DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 245 RC 013 049

AUTHOR Grundy, Ernest
TITLE Central Nebraska's Country Schools. Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier.
INSTITUTION Mountain Plains Library Association, Silt, Colo. Country School Legacy Project.
SPONS AGENCY National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Jan 81
NOTE 121p.; For related documents, see RC 013 047-058 and RC 013 070-084.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; Community Centers; Community Schools; Cultural Background; Cultural Education; Curriculum; *Educational History; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnic Groups; *One Teacher Schools; *Rural Education; *Rural Schools; School Buildings; School Community Relationship; *Small Schools; State History; Teacher Qualifications; Teacher Role; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Country School Legacy Project; Historic Sites; *Nebraska

ABSTRACT

Presenting information drawn primarily from interviews and visits to abandoned, operating, and restored country schools in Nebraska, this report is part of the Country School Legacy Project, intended to study the role rural schools played in the history of the frontier and to locate and preserve information related to country schools. The report focuses on six phases of the country school experience: schools as historic sites; schools as community centers; the role of the rural school in Americanizing ethnic groups; curriculum; the role of the teacher; and the future of the country schools. Indicating that Nebraska may be at the forefront in attempting to preserve the rural school tradition, the report describes nearly 30 rural schools that have been restored as museums and the research effort that examined and photographed nearly 100 existing country school buildings that are potential historical sites. (NEC)

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COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY: Humanities on the Frontier

CENTRAL NEBRASKA'S COUNTRY SCHOOLS

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January 1981

Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities

Sponsored by the Mountain Plains Library Association

RC 013049

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COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY: HUMANITIES ON THE FRONTIER

The Mountain Plains Library Association is pleased to be involved in this project documenting the country school experience. Funding of this project from the National Endowment for the Humanities, cost sharing and other contributions enabled us all to work with the several state-based Humanities Committees as well as many other state and local libraries, agencies and interested citizens. We are deeply impressed not only by the enthusiasm for this work by all concerned but by the wealth of experience brought to bear in focusing attention on—and recapturing—this important part of history, and how we got here. This project seems to identify many of the roots and "character formation" of our social, political and economic institutions in the West.

Already the main Project objective seems to be met, stimulating library usage and increasing circulation of historical and humanities materials in this region. Public interest is rising in regional, state and local history. Oral history programs are increasing with greater public participation. The study of genealogy—and the search for this information—is causing much interest in consulting—and preserving—historical materials. What has been started here will not end with this project. The immediate results will tour the entire region and be available for any who wish the program, film, and exhibit. There will be more discussion of—and action on—the issues involving the humanities and public policies, past and present. The Mountain Plains Library Association is proud to be a partner in this work, the Country School Legacy, and its contribution to understanding humanities on the frontier.

Joseph J. Anderson
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Chapter I.

Nebraska and the Country School Legacy

In 1980, the Mountain Plains Library Association, employing a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, authorized a study of the rural schools of an eight-state area. This report is the Nebraska section of that investigation.

Acting in accordance with directions supplied by Andrew Gulliford, the Project Director, three people in Nebraska have been primarily responsible for the research phase. Miss Sandra Scofield of Chadron State College has covered the western tiers of counties. James Dertien, Librarian for the Bellevue Public Library, has studied rural schools in the eastern section. As humanist for the state, I have dealt generally with the central counties. This report will make use of materials from their findings.

Although project directions suggested we might consider as "rural" those schools having up to six teachers, we have more than not concentrated on those with but one or two. Whereas a part of the problem in interpreting statistical analyses of rural schools is that governmental agencies often consider as "rural," a town of up to 2,500 inhabitants, for purposes of this study, we have emphasized the one-teacher school often situated in a comparatively isolated area and in a rural setting.

An important feature of our efforts has been its oral history wherein we have placed on tapes the experiences of a variety of people--present and past rural schoolteachers, students, and county superintendents, as well as others who have had experience with country schools. As a rule we have photographed these participants. Our interviews will be substance for scholarly research into the American scene. Also, with an eye toward the future of historical studies, especially those having to do with "material" culture,

we have secured information (photographs included) on two kinds of rural school buildings—those refurbished and presently serving as museums and those which preservation agencies might decide to convert into historical sites. Many of the latter group are presently used for teaching purposes. In these attempts, we have gathered data on where rural school memoribilia may be found, and have acquired, as one instance, a complete set of school board records dating from the early 1880's. While those two portions of our research have dealt with "primary" materials, we have also compiled an extensive bibliography consisting of county, school district, and state history sources plus "literary" accounts of the rural school experience. In these efforts, we have received help from many agencies—libraries, museum organizations, historical societies, both state and local, colleges and other educational groups. Scores of individuals have come forward with offers of assistance. These materials will be placed in a central depository in each state and an index to each state's collection will be disseminated.

What motives lead one to such a study of our heritage? Can one suppose that C. Reinhold Niebuhr was correct when he pointed out several decades ago that as a nation we are lately (and commendably) becoming more conscious of our past, and, having lost our "innocence," will therefore come to act in more mature ways what with an improved recognition of our history, as Walt Whitman and T. S. Eliot have both noted, of the "pastness of the present"? As to Nebraska itself, we hope that the pastness of the country school can bring to us a better recognition of the present situation in education.

Several factors may account for our present investigations into the rural schools of Nebraska; and, whereas students of the culture of this state may

also be blessed with a portion of that historical awareness which Niebuhr attributed to our nation, some factors may be distinctive in a few ways.

To use the phrasing of Walt Whitman as he exulted over the vastness of our country, Nebraska is a "varied and ample land," measuring about 200 by 500 miles. It has had a great number of school buildings to match its space. This large area was settled in a comparatively brief span of years. Despite the first school house being built in 1822 just outside the walls of Ft. Atkinson on the Missouri River north of Omaha, the majority of Nebraska's schools were constructed nearly within a fifty-year span, from the beginning of territorial settlement to the end of the nineteenth century, when virtually all of its empty lands had been taken up. Also, during the period of the state's rapid settlement, the public school movement burgeoned. This fact, added to the great influx of immigrants who wished educational advantages for their children, led to the forestation of the plains with rural school buildings.

Since many of those buildings erected within the last century are still standing, Nebraskans have a vivid because visual sense of their heritage in rural schools. In the state in 1979-80, they existed in relative profusion with over four hundred of the nation's total of over 1100. Often, one can see them along an interstate highway near a metropolitan center or tucked away in a remote area thirty or forty miles away from a population center. Still predominantly rural, a majority of the population has had some knowledge of the country school in one form or another, although the incidence of their contacts is undoubtedly lessening.

Further, controversies over consolidating the rural schools arise every few years and keep them in the public eye. Also, in recent years, the American public has heard that its "modern" educational system is not as effective as it should be, and seeking a palliative for this ailment, some have advocated a return to what it was that the rural schools did for them or their grandparents. Such nostalgic reasonings have brought the rural schools into the forefront of attention again.

This report will deal with several phases of the country school experience. The first concern will be on these schools as historic sites. The second will be on them as community centers. The third will assess the role of the rural school in Americanizing ethnic groups. A succeeding chapter will deal with curriculum, another with the role of the teacher in her little school, and a final chapter with its future.

I.

Contrary to my early expectations, I discovered that Nebraskans are in the forefront in attempting to perpetuate the rural school tradition. They have preserved a fairly large number of rural schools. While the list I will submit here is not a definitive one, although I suggest that one might profitably be made, I can report on enough of them to demonstrate that the citizens of this state have had a deep interest in our educational past. Following a discussion of those schoolhouses presently serving as historic sites, I will comment on some that could conceivably be added to them. This series will first consider the eastern part of the state, for it was there that settlement began and school districts were first formed.

The Camp Creek School. On June 26, 1980, Marvin F. Kivett, Nebraska Historic Preservation Sites Officer for the Nebraska Historical Society, announced that the Camp Creek School, District 54 in Otoe County, had been entered into the National Register of Historic Places. This school district, located eight miles south of Nebraska City, close to the Missouri River, had been founded under an impetus supplied by Congregationalist Church members newly arrived from Connecticut and other Eastern states. George F. Lee assisted in setting up a schoolhouse in Bain's Grove, also the site of a Sunday school. Lee had served a term in the Territorial Legislature in 1858 where he voted to establish a system of schools. No records exist to testify that school was ever held.

In 1861, Alexander Bain, also a member of the Territorial Legislature but in 1859, gave a conditional deed for the site on which the school building stood:

> Conditional Deed, Alexander Bain and wife
> to
> School directors of Dist. #1 [later 54]
> Filed for record Sept. 30, 1861 at 10 A.M.
>
> Aug. 13, 1861 entered between Alex Bain and wife Eleanor A. Bain of Otoe County to school district directors and their successors in office, for sum of 1 dollar. Convey 18 sq. rods for purpose of building a school house, and keep property well fenced. Also agreed that if school is abandoned property shall revert back to party of first part.[1]

Soon after the Civil War came statehood for Nebraska and with it in 1869 an Act to Establish a System of Public Instruction for the State of Nebraska. Somehow in the transitional process involving a change of state officials, District 1 became District 54. Finally in 1874-75 this comparatively record-less schoolhouse gave way to a brick structure, the one now on the National Register.

In 1875, H. K. Raymond, County Superintendent of Schools for Otoe County, submitted a report to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction regretting that such circumstances as the grasshopper "raids" had militated against the

best interests of the schools, but he found much positive to say. Of the county's seventy-eight schoolhouses, two were stone, twelve brick, sixty frame, and three either log or dug-outs. The average value of the wood schoolhouses was $529.50, he reported, while that of the brick was $4,075.00. Presumably, the Camp Creek School fell within the latter category. District 54 drew his "high commendation," along with others for "manifesting a . . . laudable emulation in supplying their children with a home during their school hours which may at once be a source of pleasure and profit to them."

Other districts had not done so well by their children—"some districts are too well satisfied with their uncomfortable, dilapidated and miserable tenements, hardly fit for man or beast." Several had broken panes of glass in their windows. The plaster was off and foundations were both poor and unbanked. Some had no hooks, nails, or shelves for the children's clothing or lunch buckets. Others had no broom. Raymond's criticism extended to the outhouses. How, he asked, could the morals of their children be otherwise than contaminated with the public exposure such facilities often afforded? He would be in favor of requiring every district to erect one or more suitable outhouses and to keep them in good repair. Not wishing to damn absolutely, he saw encouraging signs that these unconcerned districts would improve things.

Visitors to the new Camp Creek School will find an up-to-date building, with indoor toilets installed in 1975 run on water piped into the building by the Rural Water District No. 1. They will notice the electric lights that have replaced the kerosene lamps and reflectors ranged along the walls. Shades and curtains now cover the windows as against the wooden shutters of earlier times. The old board floor is covered. Further, they will see that the

school is still in session, with six students taught by Mrs. Martha Brief. The building is stuccoed and is, in the words of Mrs. Brief, in "pretty good condition." The equipment for teaching is as modern as that in any other school. It is served by Educational Service Unit #4 based in Auburn. When asked whether any special use is made of this new "historic site," Mrs. Brief replied that, while visitors would be welcome, thus far there had been none. The only notice the school had received up to January, 1981, was a plaque.[2]

St. Deroin School. The fortunes of St. Deroin School were intimately tied in with those of the Missouri River and the small town the school served. In 1853, Joseph Deroin, a half-breed, laid out the settlement as a trading and supply post for Missouri River traffic. In 1858, a subscription school was organized but superseded in 1866 by a public school. It was a wooden structure, one fortunately short-lived, if this description by the Nemaha County superintendent is an apt one:

> The school house is rather inferior to any. I will not attempt to describe it, as Judge Ritter informs us here a new one will be erected soon. However, we will speak of the stove. Judge says it is the best in the state. We do not know how that is, but we can say of a truth here, it is the best in the County. This is to their credit; it ought to be in a better house and hope it will be as another year rolls around.

Judge Ritter's forecast was accurate. In 1872, a brick schoolhouse supplied a better building for the supposedly "best" stove in the county. It was a good-sized structure and housed sixty-one students that year. Around the turn of the century, however, difficult times came for the village of St. Deroin, at its zenith having 300 habitants. The Missouri River began to change its banks (1908) and destroyed the town eventually. Its citizens decided to relocate the school

building on a bluff though still within the townsite. For six months, the salvaged school served thirty students, but the town of St. Deroin began to dwindle away as a river portage. From 1909 to 1944, Nemaha County operated the school as District 56.

In 1978, the Nebraska State Game and Parks Commission restored the brick building erected in 1872 and moved in 1908. The Commission sought to make the restoration, in its terms, "as authentic as possible." It researched old photographs, studied the ruins of the structure thoroughly, and interviewed former teachers and students.[3]

The Freeman School. In 1973, a Historic Preservation Team under the National Park Service laid out plans for a $31,000.00 project designed to preserve the Freeman School and to make it a part of the Homestead National Monument, situated near Beatrice, which commemorates the original homestead of Daniel and Agnes Freeman, often considered as the first plot of land to be filed for under the Homestead Act of 1862. Their plans materialized. In 1976-77 the school building was completely restored.[4]

Five families lived within the district when it was formed in 1868. One of these was Daniel Freeman's, whose homestead is the present site of the Homestead National Monument. In the spring of 1871, a log building valued at $5.00 was used in the newly formed District 21. Henry Wagoner, the teacher, then eighteen taught seven children during the spring session and earned $75.00. The next fall he taught three months for $112.00.

The log building gave way to a brick school located in a new site on a plot of land purchased for $1.00. The brick was made locally, possibly by T. H. Freeman, rather than by Daniel Freeman, as was once claimed. But it is Daniel

Freeman's name that has been best remembered, since it is associated with the "original" homestead. It is remembered for still another reason. In 1899, the teacher, Miss Edith Beecher, asked the school board for permission to conduct religious exercises in the school. It was granted. She read passages from the King James version of the Bible, sang songs from a gospel hymn book, and offered prayers to God. Daniel Freeman objected to these religious observances and petitioned the state superintendent of schools, William R. Jackson, to stop them. Jackson thought them not improper, commenting that the Bible did not promote the causes of any sect but was, rather, a classic that would teach moral lessons.

In further litigation involving the Gage County District Court and eventually the Nebraska Supreme Court, the latter body found that the exercises were sectarian and thus in violation of the state constitution. While later clarifying its position, the state court decided that the mere reading of the Bible was not unconstitutional and became so only when the teacher became a propagandist for a particular sectarian viewpoint. Following this judgment, the teacher went on with Bible reading sans interpretation or exegesis. To ensure against a further violation of the state constitution, Freeman, once an intelligence agent for the Union Army, visited school often.

Improvements came, as they did for most rural schools. A woodshed and water closet were added just outside the schoolhouse in 1916, a relatively early time for the latter item. In 1914, the Dempster Company put in a new water well. Electric lights came rather late, it would seem, in 1940. The first monthly electric bill was $0.75. In that same year, the teacher drew $55.00 per month but by 1950 the district paid $140.00. The total cost of operating the school in 1950 was $2595.42, in 1954, $3012.40, and in 1964, $5448.10. This last amount, the whole cost for educating seventeen children for a school year,

while considerably more than the $75.00 spent in 1871, seems hardly a lavish expenditure, even for 1964.

The brick building served the area as a polling place, as community center for debates, literary society meetings, and as a place of meeting for the First Trinity Lutheran Church in the 1870's. It fell only two years short of being used as a schoolhouse for one hundred years. School was discontinued in 1968:

> The school stands quiet now. The sounds of the teacher's bell, the children at recess and the Sunday hymns have faded, just as the tallgrass prairie has all but disappeared. Today the school gives us a window to the past--a small glimpse of life on the prairie frontier.[5]

School on the Oregon Trail. West of the Freeman school in Jefferson County sits another restored one-room schoolhouse with a long history of its own and with still other historical connections. It is District 10, commonly called "School on the Oregon Trail." Just across the road from this school, located one-half mile south of the Big Sandy Creek and one-half mile north of the Little Blue River, is the site of the Oregon Trail.

Like the St. Deroin School and others, the general area around District 10 first had a subscription school, backed by Joel Helvey and taught by Valentine Kyle. Its term was three months. Three years later a territorial district school board fixed the district's boundaries and employed a teacher. The year 1869 saw it as the Meridian School in the townsite of Meridian, a village that may have been devastated in 1875 by a tornado. The town was not rebuilt but the schoolhouse was. Around 1890, however, so many pupils were living at a distance from it that patrons looked around for a more central location and moved the building to its present site on land deeded by Jacob and Wilhemina Dein for as long as a school building sat there. About 1900 the present frame building

replaced the old structure which sold for thirty dollars to Jacob Dein who used its lumber to erect farm buildings.[6]

Through the next six decades, teacher succeeded teacher, enrollment swelled, then declined, and improvements in school textbooks came along. Finally it became difficult to find a teacher for the 1960-61 term at which time the district voted to contract with the neighboring town of Alexandria to accept its students. Four years later, its patrons dissolved the district, and the school which had served the rural area for nearly a century shut its doors.

It shut its doors as an educational institution, but kept them open in a sense to preserve the memory of the rural school. The year following the dissolution of the district, the Jefferson County Historical Society and the Alexandria Community Club leased the property for ninety-nine years and began to preserve the buildings--the schoolhouse, two privies, and a shed--as a museum. A leaflet distributed by the two sponsoring organizations states that it is open every Sunday from three to six p. m., or by the special cooperation of George Dein, a farmer who lives east and north of the schoolhouse one and one-half miles. The museum itself is located two miles east and two south of Alexandria.

On the grounds outside, one stone marker commemorates the Oregon Trail. It was placed there in 1914 by the school district and the State of Nebraska. Two stone and bronze markers, erected in the 1960's and 1970's, similarly memorialize the Pony Express and the Mormon trek. A wooden sign notes the two sponsoring agencies. As with the Camp Creek School, District 10 is now a designated State of Nebraska Historic Place. Its inside furnishings are quite as they were when school closed in 1960, though, as a museum, it holds much of the memoribilia

of the country school of many years past.

District 17, Polk County. In an area with low population and with no large or even medium-sized cities, the Polk County Historical Society has created a museum complex that seems especially to stand out. Among its holdings in Osceola are an old-time "Grandpa's" shop with forge, harness, fly nets and tools of a long gone day, a German Lutheran Church with all its original furnishings moved in from north of the city, a complete barbershop, the first postoffice in the county dating from 1870, an original log house built in 1872, a sod house constructed within the last few years, and a mansion, the Mickey house, built in 1884 by John H. Mickey, a former Nebraska governor. Within this cluster of buildings sits the schoolhouse which once served neighboring District 17.

It is equipped just as it was, with a few additions. The outside toilets, the merry-go-round, the outdoors pump, books, desks were left intact. There are period outer garments hanging in the vestibule where a water bucket and wash basin are placed for an often chilly use. Text-books and pictures dating back to the early days of the district in the 1880's have been donated by residents of the Osceola area.

Using the resources of the school-museum, the Historical Society gave a Christmas school program one year. Another time, Mrs. Mildred Flodman, drawing on her memories, and her Mother's, as former rural school teachers, had classes in reading, art, arithmetic, and geography. In an October, 1980, meeting held at the Senior Citizens' Center in Stromsburg, Mrs. Flodman led classes in such subjects as Nebraska history and mental arithmetic. The participants wore clothing reminiscent of pioneer times.[7]

The Cunningham School, Heritage Village, State Fair Grounds. The schoolhouses just discussed have been displayed in a more or less degree

for public viewing. The next two or three in line can be said to serve the general public, of course, but they have taken up a different function—that of being involved in the day-to-day educational processes of present-day school children.

The Cunningham School, District 113, was situated in Newman Township, seven miles northwest of Valparaiso in Saunders County. Like most other rural school districts in Eastern Nebraska, it has a history running back to the dates of first settlement. The original building burned in the 1930's but was rebuilt where the first sat. As many as thirty-two children attended the school, often carrying their own water to school, sitting three at a desk on occasion, and running outdoors to the outhouses at recess time.

Because, in 1966, only four youngsters lived in the district, the school board contracted elsewhere for their instruction. There it sat for nine years until the Nebraska State Fair Board purchased it and moved it to the State Fair gounds in Lincoln where it, along with such other buildings as the Hudson log cabin and the early-day Roca depot, now constitutes Heritage Village. The Lincoln Public Schools permit students to spend one day each as members of social studies classes in this building that they can experience actually one phase of their state's history.[8]

The Gibbon School at the Stuhr Museum. Materials supplied by the officials of Stuhr Museum tell the story of how this one-room rural school came to be a part of its complex:

> In August, 1967, a one room, white frame school house in excellent condition was moved from northwest of Gibbon, in Buffalo County, to Stuhr Museum. It was donated by Dr. Kenneth Pierson of Neligh, Nebraska, who attended the school in the 1930's.
>
> The county superintendent's records of School District 25 show this school must have been in operation in 1876, and it could possibly have been used a year or two earlier.
>
> The floor frame of tongue and groove and dowel construction confirms the date of construction of the building. The side walls and windows are believed to be of a later construction. Museum officials estimate that the desks, stove and other furnishings inside the school building were manufactured and placed in the building near the turn-of-the-century.

> The bell tower and wood window frames (used to replace aluminum counterparts) came from an unused building near Prague, Nebraska. The very old lightning rod and weather vane came from Prague, also.[9]

Stuhr Museum has a fairly extensive list of books once used in rural schools. Older titles include James Montieth's First Lessons in Geography, 1863; Harper's School Geography, ca. 1875; Joseph H. Allen's A Manual of Instruction in Latin, 1887; Patterson's Common School Speller, 1874; A Complete Arithmetic, Oral and Written, 1878; and the well-known Palmer Method of Business Writing, 1915.

The Stuhr Museum cooperates with the Grand Island School District in a way that makes good use of the Gibbon School. Each grade aligns a special topic, say one in Nebraska history, with special artifacts at the school, in what is now a Grades I-VI program. A portion of the following release speaks for this joint effort:

> Grade IV, which averages about 480 students each year, utilizes the museum's rural school. After prework in the classroom studying rural school instruction, one class a day is transported to the museum by school vans. The class is then divided and each half rotates at lunch time. Half the class spends half a day in school. The schoolhouse is well supplied with early texts, slates, slate pencils, straight pens and ink. The class does spelling bees, penmanship exercises, and studies Nebraska history and geography. Students and teacher are responsible for carrying in firewood and water. Recess is time for such games as hoop rolling and Red Rover.

Once the museum employed former rural school teachers. As it became more difficult to find them, it had to use those from the regular classroom. After one-half of the students have their half-day in the rural school, they move to the blacksmith shop where they have a hands-on activity. The basic philosophy of the museum study, one similar to that practiced at Old Sturbridge Village in Connecticut, is to let the students see, handle, and work with the artifacts. Obviously a day spent studying in a rural school setting will

impress a situation on the students' minds in a way that will complement the more abstract mode of reading words alone. In traveling around the state in recent years and being concerned with whether the humanities have made use of museum facilities in any systematic way, I have learned of very few programs such as those at the State Fair school and Stuhr, of few where curriculum makers seem sufficiently aware of the artifact as symbol, which, when looked into closely, will tell the viewer so much of what lies behind it, or is encompassed in it. As a system of study used by literary critics, it yields surprising results and will be similarly effective for teachers in such other areas as social studies.

As a last note on the educational use of their museum, Warren Rodgers, the educational officer, has recently received a mini-grant from the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities to take the museum to all schools in Hall County. His touring collection of artifacts, housed in compartmentalized trunks, will be programmed into classrooms for two weeks per school. It will include photos, teacher guides, suggested activities, and evaluation sheets. Considering the problems involved in transporting students to the museum, it is well that students learn of the pioneer heritage through such artifacts that can be bundled into trunks even though the ideal would be to have them attend the school itself, as the Grand Island students do.

McCorkindale School, Wayne State College. The September 26, 1980, edition of the Wayne Stater, a Wayne State College newspaper, shows Dr. Lyle Seymour, President of WSC, explaining a planetarium of fifty years ago to a group of children dressed in the garb of that or an earlier time, in a one-room schoolhouse whose furnishings appear to be about eighty years old. An issue of the Wayne Herald, dated September 29, 1980, has a photograph showing Mrs. Shirley

Hamer, a teacher at West Elementary School in Wayne, conducting a class with her fourth grade students at the same schoolhouse. They too are dressed in the clothing of the early twentieth century. It is not exactly a novel experience for Mrs. Hamer. She was the last teacher in this building when it was situated in the country.

This one-room structure on the Wayne State campus is the McCorkindale School, named for Miss Mamie McCorkindale, an education teacher on the Wayne campus from 1920 to 1949. Formerly, it was District 13 in the county. The Wayne State Foundation restored it in period items of the 1890-1910 decades. The building itself, a typical "box-car" kind so common throughout the land, is about one hundred years old. Besides the old furniture which includes a parlor organ and a potbellied stove, there is a collection of 250 textbooks, all at least fifty years old, and two sets of encyclopedias, one published in the 1880's. The building, acquired in 1966, serves, in the Wayne Herald's terms, "as an official Nebraska Centennial museum to recognize an era in Nebraska education to which Wayne State College made an early significant contribution." At the dedication in 1966, poet John G. Neihardt, whom I will cite later, spoke about his memories of rural school education.[10]

Goose Valley School in Tomahawk Park. In 1970, the "Little Red Schoolhouse," standing unused in Goose Valley three miles northeast of the village of Berwyn, caught the eye of Orin H. Talbot of Broken Bow. Through his efforts, the City of Broken Bow bought this building and moved it to Tomahawk Park in the northwestern edge of the city. There, it is maintained by the Broken Bow Retired Teachers' Association which furnished it with old desks, books, a globe, and other fixtures. On one occasion at least, the Custer County Association of Retired Teachers held one of its meetings there.

This box-like structure with a small entryway, three windows on each side, stands in Tomahawk Park "as a tribute," states the Custer County Chief in its September 15, 1979, issue, "to the rich heritage of the pioneers and dedicated teachers who educated the area children despite many inconveniences and lack of materials."[11] In this general area, at Callaway, citizens there have restored a former one-room country school and have placed it in their Seven Valleys Museum.

Several school-museums have been established in South Central Nebraska. In Lexington, in 1959, the Reed family presented to the Dawson County Historical Society a one-room school, formerly District 55. It was set on the grounds of Memorial Park and later in 1972 moved next to the Historical Society's museum building for permanent display. It is equipped with the furniture normal to such schoolhouses—double desks, pot-bellied stove sitting front center, lamp brackets, a vestibule for lunches and coats, wall maps, and the inevitable picture of George Washington. The museum management is in the process of lining up the many pictures it has of older schools and their patrons and children.[12]

The small town of Edison in Furnas County moved a schoolhouse into its city park. District 102 was situated three and one-half miles south of Edison. First formed in 1896, the district had its last school in 1935 and was dissolved in 1949, but the building sat unused until 1968 when it was moved into Edison. Its Nebraska Historical marker bills it as "The Small Schoolhouse," and rightly so, for it measures fourteen by sixteen feet. Mrs. Clara Carey, the caretaker in Edison, noted that for some time it was regarded to be the smallest schoolhouse in the state but it was later learned that such was not the case.[13]

Sunny Hillside, #11, Cambridge Park. Adolph Thumin, who became a banker in Cambridge, started to school at Sunny Hillside four miles southeast of

Cambridge in 1896 at the age of six. A number of years later he bought the building for the City Park at Cambridge and he and his sister (name not given) moved it in. A frame building about twenty by thirty feet, with the usual three windows on each side and the small vestibule, and pump outside, it occasionally serves teachers as a place to hold classes.[14] Quite close to Cambridge, Orleans also has a country schoolhouse, once called the Midway School, District 76. It was located between Alma and Orleans and is now a part of the Harlan County Museum.

Warp School, Pioneer Village, Minden. The school-museums thus far discussed have come from the work of some non-profit organization like a city, a state or a county historical society. The Warp School, a part of the large Pioneer Village complex at Minden, is privately owned. Owner Harold Warp, Chicago industrialist and a former student of this rural school, had it moved into Minden completely intact about 1947 when school was discontinued in it. It is equipped exactly as it was at that time. All of the textbooks, for instance, remain locked up in bookcases as are the school records.

I will next consider country schools in the Western third of the state. My principal source of information will be an essay prepared by Miss Sandra Scofield for "The Country School Legacy" in January, 1981. Throughout the 1940's and 50's, one might have expected to see a rural schoolhouse every five or six miles even in this densely populated area. Though our state still ranks high in numbers of country school districts, the 430 or so that remain are but a fraction of what there were once. In the vast 2,063 square miles of Sioux County, for example, there are now only fifteen school districts and thirteen schools whereas at an earlier time there were eighty-five districts, most of which were country schools. Dawes County, as another instance, once formed

119 districts across its 1389 square miles. In 1900 it had seventy-six schools. Today only seventeen districts remain of which fifteen are rural and fourteen maintain their own "town" elementary schools. Three counties in the Panhandle area no longer maintain Class I districts, the term generally used to refer to rural schools.[15] This condition holds for virtually all other areas of the state.

District 17, Sheridan County. What has happened to the literally hundreds of country school buildings that once dotted the landscape of Western Nebraska? A letter from Mrs. Robert Gealy, Gordon, respecting Mt. Pleasant, District 17, Sheridan County, to the "Country School Legacy Project may reveal a disposition of and attitude toward these old landmarks that is common:

> District 17 ceased to exist about eight years ago when it merged with two other districts to form an enlarged District 83. School continued in the Mt. Pleasant Schoolhouse, however, until last year, when a new, more centralized facility was built. Thus right now the old schoolhouse is unused except as a community center. We hope very much to maintain it in good condition, feeling that we may again need the space in case of enlarged district enrollment, and also believing that a schoolhouse which served faithfully for so many years deserves a great deal of respect.

Many say of a building that may have served three or four generations of a family, "I hate to see the old school go." Their foresight may have been like that of the patrons of Peaceful Plains School in Thomas County. Built in 1968 and closed soon thereafter for ten years, it was reopened in 1979 where it continues in 1980-81 to host school.

Evergreen School. Private individuals have preserved others. One of these, the Evergreen School, situated southwest of Chadron on the Deadhorse Road, has been maintained by Mr. and Mrs. Jack Lindeken.

This school, established in January, 1886, was constructed of logs taken from the pine trees that grew in the area. The log cabin still stands on the original site. In 1912, it was covered with finished lumber and a bell tower

added. The building has not changed significantly since that time, and, while school in the Evergreen District #22 has not been in session for over thirty-five years, the Lindekens have maintained it so that it looks quite as it did when school was being held.

Flag Butte. There is a link between the Evergreen School and another "preserved" school. When the Evergreen School closed, its children went to District 18 three miles to the north. Flag Butte, as it was called, closed during the 1970's, but the Deadhorse Community preserved the building constructed in 1887.

An interesting story ties the name, Flag Butte, to the school and its history. One Sunday in an early time, settlers, meeting at the home of Ben Davis just west of the butte, thought they needed an eminence where a flag could be raised on suitable occasions like Independence Day. What would serve better than the butte nearby? Thus, it received its name. The flag-raising activity on the Fourth of July lapsed until the local 4-H Club revived it in 1957. Now 100 people attend a sunrise flag-raising event every July the Fourth and meet for breakfast served by the community's extension club in the schoolhouse.

Closing the school in the mid-70's did not mean the end of the building. Members of the Deadhorse Community decided to save it and began a fund-raising drive aimed to gather money to buy it at auction. Bidding opened with $100.00 offered by the club members. There were no other bids. Apparently word had spread around that the old structure was to be saved for future community use. With the remaining sum of $500.00 left from their fund-raising efforts, the club was able to purchase the contents of the schoolhouse, and, these, together with donations, enabled the newly incorporated, non-profit Flag Butte Community

Center to have a building that serves it to this day. They help maintain the Center by staging a Farmer's Market each fall.

Harrison, Sioux County Historical Society. While collecting histories of country schools, the Sioux County Historical Society decided to move an old schoolhouse into Harrison to restore it. Two men, Dr. Grayson Mead and Pete Nunn, donated the $200.00 for buying it. Now it sits on the main street of the small town beside a small post office, also restored. The building, although changed slightly in outward appearance when one of two doors was sealed shut, has an interior restoration quite complete in an early twentieth-century motif. Most items have been donated. They include slate blackboards, an antique round stove, desks, bookcases, a water jug of crockery, and books from the county superintendent's office. A small jacket hangs in the cloakroom to give it the same kind of personal touch as that in the Osceola schoolhouse described earlier.

Ash Hollow and others. Western Nebraska offers still other examples of schoolhouse preservation. In the southern Panhandle, the Keith County Historical Society has put the old District 7 building on display in Ogallala. The Banner County Historical Society has moved a small log structure built in 1886 next to its museum in Harrisburg. A stone schoolhouse, constructed in 1903, and now restored, is a part of the Ash Hollow State Historical Park near Lewellen, on the site of Ash Hollow, a major campground for travelers on the Oregon Trail. Farther east, the town of Bassett in Rock County maintains a small, restored schoolhouse on the grounds of the Rock County Historical Society.

Rush Creek and Mud Springs. Two other schools, now being researched, are of historical interest. Rush Creek School, District 14 in Cheyenne County,

was built in 1921 and has been in operation since. The present building replaced the original one that began operating in 1898. It was first known as the German School until 1918 when the name, apparently being unpopular with patriotic enthusiasts, was changed to Happy Hollow. Some of the children now attending the Rush Creek School are grandchildren of the original German pupils. The Mud Springs School, first built in 1901, located in Morrill County southeast of Bridgeport, is currently working through the offices of Congresswoman Virginia Smith to be designated as a national historic site. The school district has been dissolved but the building is still used by the community. The Nebraska Historical Society has offered seasonal exhibits in the school. The area is of particular interest because it was the site of a stage, Pony Express, and telegraph station. It was also a military outpost and the scene of a battle between United States soldiers and Cheyenne Indians.

II.

Rural Schools as Potential Museum Sites. While it was not the chief intention of "The Country School Legacy" initially to discover rural school buildings that are already functioning in a museum capacity, we did locate nearly thirty, as previously described, in what is admittedly not a definitive search. Our main efforts have been examining and photographing nearly 100 existing country school buildings that might in the future swell the number of preserved structures to more than thirty. We will assume that the forces that worked to mark that thirty might similarly, using the resources we have garnered, work to name additional ones. I will next consider selected instances.

Areas with Historical Significance. The Alexandria schoolhouse near the Oregon Trail, the Freeman School at the Homestead National Monument at Beatrice,

the St. Deroin School near Indian Cave State Park, and the Mud Springs School just discussed have received advantages from being situated in an area of broad historical significance. This has surely enhanced their support from preservation agencies and from public attendance. Can others be similarly aided?

Good idea!

Later, I will cite instances from the writings of Mari Sandos, the well-regarded author of Old Jules, bearing on her country schoolteaching. Because she is significant in a literary-historical sense, it seems both desirable and logical that a country schoolhouse be restored in her memory and named for her.

Also, later in the report, the name of Bessie Streeter Aldrich will appear in respect to the country school picture in southeastern Nebraska, and, while she did not teach as Mari Sandos did, she wrote knowledgeably about one. Similarly, John G. Neihardt might also be commemorated for he did teach in a country school as a young man, as we shall later note. About seven miles west of the small town of Tryon, Nebraska, in the Sand Hills, sits a rural building known in the area as the Snyder School for the family of which Nebraska author Nellie Snyder Yost is a member. School is still in session at this small, modern building. It would be well to give this building some kind of public notice in the name of the author of No Time on Her Hands, even though it is not exactly the same one she attended nor in quite the same location.

Structures bearing the names of such historically significant people as just suggested will gain attention from the name, of course. But, it is not mandated anywhere that only the well-known can be remembered. Why not also the unsung laborers in the vineyard of rural school education? They will be remembered through their testimony given us on taped interviews, but, regrettably in few other places but for an occasional news clipping, and in

fading memories. There are many teachers who have devoted their lives to country schools, many long-term county superintendents, and even school board members for whom country schools might be named. It is not an uncommon practice in cities. It can be done in the country also.

I will not hesitate to call the Sand Hills of Nebraska an area of historical significance. Students of Nebraska history know how large and forbidding it loomed in the imaginations both of Indians and early white settlers. They know the Sand Hills were settled relatively late. The Sand Hills are an area distinctive to Nebraska—is there another quite like it? I suggest, then, that one or more of the small, isolated country school buildings that served this vast area so well be preserved as an important component of its history. There are many choices. One possibility is the Triangle School, about ten miles northeast of Arthur. A small, frame building, it is situated in one of the numerous valleys of this county without a river, where rain from the hills finds a subterranean exit, if exit at all, in those hollowed-out cups.

But, one hears, the site would be so inaccessible. Should it not be moved into Arthur so it would be closer to the highway where motorists traveling from Ogalalla to Hyannis might view it? No, leave it where it is. In so stating, I hail Emerson's poem "Each and All" into court. The poet admired the sea shell as it rested on the beach in its natural surroundings. He found it had lost its luster when he placed it on the mantel in his parlor. He had not brought home the sea. In much the same vein, Thoreau insisted that one could not eat the true huckleberry in Boston, only in the hills around Boston where one picked it for one's self in its natural setting. One needs the sense of setting. One needs, further, to travel seven miles on a narrow asphaltic strip, to note

the vast stretches of grassland, to ride up and down the hill swells, then by chance to come over one of them to see, as I did, a herd of whitefaced cattle, and in the same line of vision, a tiny white schoolhouse, framed against a file of trees, an unusual sight in that land. When we can not have the sea on our mantels nor pick our own huckleberries, we have to take the shell into the parlor and huckleberries in a can, and in most cases the country school in the city museum complex. Once in a while, however, people will savor the complete experience of a thing in its natural, normal setting.

The Country School in Centers of Government. About any school building we have photographed can be a candidate for development, quite like the Cunningham School on the Nebraska State Fair Grounds which is viewed by many people as a part of the annual State Fair, a magnet for thousands of Nebraskans every fall, and where it can be used fpr educational purposes as remarked earlier of the Lincoln Public Schools. The once rural school on the campus at Chadron State College is another instance, as are those at such locations as Orleans, Edison, and Cambridge. In this respect, the general awareness of the country school as being of historical interest has revived conversation at Kearney State College about itself moving a country school onto its campus. I suggest that "The Country School Legacy" has sparked this revived interest. The opportunities for such groups as senior citizens, city service organizations, and historical societies are nearly without limit.

One instance might lend specificity to this comment. In Valley County in Arcadia, a group of energetic women, led by Mrs. Winnie Arnold, City Librarian, and Mrs. Wilma Pickett, Historian, have researched the sites of country school buildings within a ten-to-fifteen mile radius of Arcadia.

Several photographs of abandoned structures reveal some "ragged beggars sunning." They have found some that now serve as machine sheds and, in one instance, as a bee house. They have located some that are in good condition, including one northwest of the city that is still in session. It is this kind of interest in discovering the community's resources that will lead them in time, I predict, to consider how it is they might get one of those buildings set aside as a historic site.

Like them, others will also become conscious of their own resources and will take steps to ensure that the country school not become a vanished part of our history. It is well that they do, for the country schools are not as numerous by far as they once were. Nor just the physical attributes will be in danger of disappearing from our knowledge but also the memories that will grow dimmer with passing decades.

If appropriate follow-up activities are conducted, using the several hundred photographs and descriptions produced by "The Country School Legacy Project," there is a good chance that future generations will be able to see the physical actuality of this early, first step in education in the mountain-plains area.

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Chapter II.

Rural Schools as Community Centers

Nebraska writer, Bess Streeter Aldrich, had Abbie Deal her leading character in A Lantern In Her Hand attend a log school house in Iowa during the early years of the Civil War, and, while her description of the primitive building says nothing directly of Nebraska's, it does indicate something of the conditions under which children of the day attended school. Rough shelves fastened to the walls served as desks fronted by long benches of equal height which in a Procrustean way accommodated the six-foot boy and the six-year-old girl at the same time. Thus, while studying, the students had their backs toward the teacher but had to whip their legs around to face him at recitation time, Abbie carefully concealing her petticoats while a more daring Regina Deal flounced around, daringly oblivious of showing hers. The students' outer garments hung on nails around the empty wall. Everyone drank from the same dipper. They were heated to some degree by a stove placed in the center of the room. Often their food in the lunch pails was frozen.

With husband Will, Abbie moved to Nebraska. In 1876-77 she attended the meetings of a reading circle which met at Woodpecker School every Friday night. The participants wore ribbon badges initialed "S.C.L.R.C." which stood for Stove Creek Precinct Literary Reading Circle. One team was the Reds, another the Yellows, and a third the Blues. Each group would recite in its turn on a Friday night the poem, "The Wreck of the Hesperus," or Hamlet's speech to his father's ghost, or Poe's "The Raven," among others. On the fourth Friday night, all members would congregate on the stage, resplendent in their ribbons, to be judged. It was in this way that Aldrich's farm people found surcease from

an exceptionally hard winter.[1]

A few people have thought that Abbie's early school was in Nebraska. That belief does not stand the scrutiny of careful reading. The story places it in Iowa. Aldrich's description of it, however, could just as well have been about a school in eastern Nebraska. Outside of her account of the reading circle, which has the ring of actual truth about it, Aldrich says nothing else about the day-by-day life of the school, strange in that she speaks so often of other "cultural" matters, especially painting and singing. Neither of these figures in the school and community relationship, however. Still, her account of the reading circle is welcome, for she does describe in some detail what went on there as to names of songs and poems recited and the nature of the event otherwise.

School matters get considerable attention in Grace Snyder's account of her life in Nebraska, as told to her daughter, Nellie Snyder Yost, and related in No Time on My Hands.[2] Several times Mrs. Snyder tells of community activities held in connection with the country, both in the area about ten miles northwest of Cozad and eight to ten miles west of Tryon, also in Nebraska.

As she relates it, each schoolhouse in the area hosted a Sunday school. Annually, several would convene for a picnic, generally out-of-doors and widely attended. The event would feature a parade composed of banner-laden groups representing each school, followed by a program with singing and speaking of "pieces." In this way, as with so many other districts, the school house made religious observances possible and tied several localities together. Where churches were missing, the country school served as surrogate.[3]

The family attended the literaries and Grange meetings also. One night one was held in a hilly area called "Little Kentucky," after Kentuckians who had settled there. Everyone brought food to the meeting in the schoolhouse. After the meal, the remainder was auctioned off. Mrs. Snyder's father bought a roasted chicken to take home but was himself roasted by his wife the next day

when they began to serve it, to find that the viscera had not been removed.

There were debates also at the schoolhouse in which Mrs. Snyder's father would argue, taking either side of a question. He sang too. Mrs. Snyder has given the whole of a ballad, "Fair Charlotte." It concerned a young girl who lived with her parents in a secluded mountain home, "and she was fair." In time Young Charles in a sleigh appeared on a bitterly cold night to take her to a ball in a village fifteen miles away. Although wrapped up, she began to get cold, then colder, and colder still. Then she died, but Charles did not know it until, offering her his hand to assist her from the sleigh, he saw she did not move. Then he spoke:

"Why sit you there like a monument
That hath no power to stir"?
He called her once, he called her twice.
She answered not a word.
He asked for her hand again,
And still she never stirred.
He took her hand in his. 'Twas cold,
And hard as any stone.
He tore the mantle from her face,
And the cold stars on it shone.
Then quickly to the lighted hall,
Her lifeless form he bore.
Fair Charlotte was a frozen corpse,
She spoke to them no more.
He took her to her parents' home,
And they no harsh word spoke,
For they saw by the sadness on his face
That Charlie's heart was broke.[4]

Ha!

Modern listeners could easily disapprove of this poem as being unduly sentimental, nurtured as many have been on the Mark Twain kind of realism. He despised what he thought was false sentimentality in the popular poetry of his times and lampooned it accordingly in his Stephen Dowling Bots poem in Huckleberry Finn. Mark Twain to the contrary, and perhaps H. L. Mencken, whom a professor once accused of killing sentiment in literature,

there is little doubt that many romantic hearts thrilled to the voice of the singer as his lyric notes filled the country schoolhouse with the sad story of young Charlotte.

In the mid-1890s, the country had a drought and crop failure. Residents of Cass County, Missouri, from which the family of Mrs. Snyder had migrated, sent a carload of supplies for their stricken friends and relatives in Nebraska. A relief committee set up its headquarters in the schoolhouse and from it administered supplies to the needy. Since the community had little work to do that winter, what with the crop failure, it had time to socialize at literaries in the schoolhouse. One humorous, ironic song caught on and was repeated often:

> We have reached the land of drouth and heat,
> Where nothing grows for us to eat.
> For winds that blow with scorching heat,
> Nebraska Land is hard to beat.
>
> Oh, Nebraska Land! Sweet Nebraska Land!
> While on your burning soil I stand,
> And look away across the plains,
> And wonder why it never rains.
> Till Gabriel doth his trumpet sound,
> They'll say the rain has gone around.[5]

One rarely finds the same richness of detail about the community meetings as found in the Aldrich and Snyder accounts. It is a subject that generally comes up in any discussion of the country school. Early settlers in Nebraska often lived too far from a city or town to use its facilities as centers: further, they enjoyed being with their own kind. So, if the area did not have a church, people had to rely on the only building they had, short of a barn, in which to congregate and to hold their box socials, literaries, Sunday schools, Grange meetings, and dances. In succeeding pages, I will display several accounts of the use of the schoolhouse as community center, as supplied in letters, interviews, and histories, then come to consider the role of those centers in the present day.

In his autobiographical Life in an American Denmark, Alfred C. Nielsen told of activities around 1910 in the Danish folk school in Nysted, northwest five miles from Dannebrog. Students put on plays in the Danish language, Nielsen recalls, and many people from the community attended them. His father and mother also went and, since baby sitters were unknown, the children accompanied the parents. Before he knew about Shakespeare, he had heard the names of Macbeth and Hamlet. Faculty members would lecture on literary and historical subjects. Frequently, students and faculty would join to form a small orchestra.[6] In this way, the Nysted school served to help Danish settlers retain a sense of their national heritage. We will note later, however, that the public school, in Nielsen's judgment, was the principal influence in Americanizing young Danes.

In early-day Nemaha County, in 1858, the local schoolhouse helped the pioneers cultivate their love of music. Mr. Dye, a dancing instructor, taught round dances, the waltz, the polka, and the schottische. He and his brothers gave open-air concerts as well. At a nominal cost per member, they set up a dancing school in the Nemaha schoolhouse. There, he demonstrated the rudiments of music so his scholars could learn how to sight read. He must have had some success, for reports indicated that the children could be heard whistling and singing his hymns, folk, and patriotic songs on the streets.[7] As a collateral matter, touching on this use of the schoolhouse, the editors of the book cited above did not see fit to give the small county or village schools any more attention as "cultural" centers than just that the schoolhouse served as a place for teaching music. Apparently, what went on in the schoolhouse during instructional hours was not considered cultural. There is one exception to my statement. They cited the difficult experiences of the Grimsen

children in the schools of the day as in Sophus Winther's Take All to Nebraska (1936).[8] These were hardly cultural. I do have to question whether the editors of Auburn, in selecting only the cruelties of the country school in the Winther book as their virtually sole mention of the country school, overbalanced matters against it.

Everett Dick, Union College historian, addresses the question of the rural school as community center:

> The country schools were definitely community centers. The old sod schoolhouse was a center for preaching. Many Seventh-day Adventist Churches had their beginnings in schoolhouses. There were almost no Adventist churches in the towns and cities until 1800. The schoolhouses all over the plains were the scenes of literary societies which met about once every two weeks in the winter. Not every school had one and this not every year but they were a widespread influence. Every school had a box supper or a pie supper annually if there was a live teacher. The money was used for school equipment, library, etc. Last day of school picnics were sometimes held. The Grange met in our schoolhouse and it was used for political caucuses and voting, although only one in a township was so used. This is all gone today. You would never know there had been a schoolhouse where it stood in most places.[9]

Imagine a dead teacher!

Some further idea of the substance of the literary societies of the day (circa 1915) can be gleaned from the recollections of former United States Senator Carl T. Curtis. Interviewer James Smith, a historian at Kearney State College, asked him about issues current during World War I:

> In the country school that I had come from they had what they called a Literary Society; it would meet on Friday nights and they would get the adults around the school district to debate. Well, many of them didn't want to do it. I don't know if they were backward people, but they were timid about taking part in that sort of thing. But I do remember the debate on women's suffrage, out there in the school district two miles west and two miles south of Minden. And, I think about two or three people debated on a side. But I remember one farmer who was opposed to it, and his idea was pretty much to ridicule. He classified women who were in favor of suffrage as eccentric or exhibitionists. He said that not long ago there was a women's suffrage meeting in Minden and some woman came in from some distance and made quite a speech and he happened to be in town the next

> morning and he saw her leave town. She was leaving the pool room. WWhat kind of woman was that"? he said. The man that carried the day was an individual who had served in the state legislature. His name was Victor Anderson. He was a large man, impressive. He lived a half-mile south of the schoolhouse and he was for extending the vote to women. And the principal thing he talked about--the mother's right. He said, "Who has a right to say something about how this country's run--the mothers"? Naturally, he had an emotional appeal, but he also made it very logical and it was a complete answer to individuals who used ridicule and classified women who were favoring women's suffrage as eccentric or exhibitionist or something like that.[10]

Even prior to the frame or log buildings which were the centers for activities described earlier in this chapter, early settlers met in the sod schoolhouses that served generally in the treeless areas where lumber was not easily accessible. Among other writers, Frances Jacobs Alberts has preserved the memories of people who had experience with these primitive buildings. As editor, he has collected three volumes of "sod house memories," some of which tell of the school as community center.

They congregated in buildings that may have been but sixteen feet by twenty, that had dirt floors that, when wet, as they frequently were from leaky ceilings, became as "slick as grease," that could harbor snakes as in a story told by Mari Sandos in her Sand Hills Sundays, that had desks placed against the walls as in the earlier Aldrich account, that had low ceilings, and, having but few windows, were generally quite dark inside.

In such a sod schoolhouse, Mrs. Gladys Shattuck taught at Burge, twelve miles south of Valentine, close to what one might call one of the "lake districts" of the Sand Hills. Often in fear of prairie fires, she rode four miles to school against a north wind to teach twelve pupils. At a drawing, often a feature of the box social, she won an old horse which she sold later for ten dollars.[11]

Early-day settlers at Brownlee in Cherry County also used their sod schoolhouses as community centers. Theirs is a distinctive story in that they were blacks, once living as slaves in the South, then escaping via the Underground Railroad to Canada, after which, when word of free lands in Nebraska reached them, they settled first in Overton, then in Cherry County about 1909. Doing what they could with the sandy sod, they built stores, a church, and a schoolhouse. There were about 175 settlers to begin with but by 1940 the colony was gone. In a chapter, "Negro Homesteading in Nebraska," (Sod Houses, III, p. 261) the conditions of school life are described, especially the graduation day at Riverview, District 113, when there were not enough chairs for all the visitors. The men brought in boards and laid them across the chairs for seats. Then there were recitations, speeches, and singing, "Wait for the Wagon," as one title. Everyone glowed. The young men wore new suits, the girls had ribbons, long sashes, and full skirts. The school superintendent preached about two things—that teachers were underpaid, and that knowledge was power.

There are several other instances. E. E. Bowers, Stronsburg, recalled that the school board charged nothing for community use of his sod schoolhouse. Someone might bring a magic lantern, a phonograph and records and put on a show. (Sod Houses, II, p. 12) Another contributor remembered that a Sunday school was organized at her sod schoolhouse, also that it was used by a literary society and a singing school. Because libraries were virtually unheard of in her area, her father would write poems and recite them at school programs. (Sod Houses, II, pp. 68-69). Eleanor Penny, Sunset Ranch, Sargent, commented similarly in recalling that the sod schoolhouse she knew had church services, literaries,

and spelling bees. (Sod House, I, p. 63)

Mrs. Mae Manion spent her first seven years of school in a sod schoolhouse in Sheridan County. She was born in 1891 of parents who settled south of Hays Springs some time around 1888. Teaching like so many others of those early times at the age of seventeen, she had two careers as country schoolteacher spanning fifty-five years—from 1908 to 1912 and from 1946 to 1963. Compiler and editor of Prairie Pioneers of Box Butte County, and now writing about her recollections, she granted an interview, a portion of which touches on the community use of her rural schoolhouse.

Of one community meeting, she remembers being stood on a table at the age of five reciting, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star." She recalls that the school had debates. One unusual question, debated with humor, was resolved that a dishrag is more useful than a broom. Another debate might center on the worth of William Jennings Bryan, and, presumably, on the issue of the free coinage of silver. They often had spelldowns at the literaries, which, Mrs. Manion recalls, she once won over a "well-educated" man. She still remembers that her defeated opponent may not have understood the proper meaning of the word that sank him. Some songs were taken from the Civil War, "Marching Through Georgia," for instance. Others were prohibition songs and there was the popular "Row, row, row your boat." All adults participated. At times, the school children would put on a program for their parents. Often the schoolhouse served as a voting place. Mrs. Manion tells of a sod schoolhouse not far from the South Dakota border that had its windows boarded up at the time of the Wounded Knee Indian scare. People congregated there for protection, leading one resident to say wryly that the whites were all gathered together

so that the Indians could get them all in one bunch.[12] HA!

The experiences of Mrs. Maude Chamberlain McGuire are worth relating because they say something about the spirit of a community in Box Butte County in the Hemingford area. Though now living in Indianapolis, Mrs. McGuire attended three country schools there for her first five grades. Hers was the only black family in each of the districts, and, although related to Robert Anderson, an ex-slave who settled in Nebraska in 1870 and became a prosperous rancher, her own family was poor.[13]

Like so many other country schoolhouses, those Mrs. McGuire attended served as places for religious exercises. First there was Sunday school for both young and old. Then the children were let out to play on the basis that two sessions was a lot of sitting for them. Such a circumstance is not in itself distinctive. What was was the sense of toleration, of trust, and of community closeness. For example, the building was never locked. Should a stranger be stranded he knew he would find a haven in it, could build a fire, and go to sleep. On no occasion were these privileges ever abused. Vandalism did not exist. Should a teacher send a note home relative to a student's behavior, she got the utmost in cooperation from the parents. There was a mutual trust and respect, as Mrs. McGuire saw it, between parents and teacher.

It was the board's obligation to find a teacher a place to board, so generally it prevailed on some rancher with a vacant bedroom to put the teacher up, a responsibility, I suggest, few present-day school boards would voluntarily assume. On the day when the salary check was due the teacher, a member of Mrs. McGuire's family might pick up the check at the treasurer's house, keep it overnight, and deliver it to the teacher the next morning. Once, one of the children got off his horse to open a gate and dropped it. Consternation reigned

at home until they retraced their steps and found it. She was disturbed that her teacher might not be paid. Mrs. McGuire liked the country school much better than she did her later experiences in city schools. She found no bickering or wrangling around in the former places, and did not notice any anti-black feelings whatsoever in the rural areas. As a black student in a white school, she was treated equally, although, actually, as she relates it, she was not really ever conscious of being black. She visited at homes of white families where the mothers might have parties for them, offering the children rolls, chicken salad, and fruit.[14] These community-school relationships made Mrs. McGuire's experiences in country schools happy ones.

I have commented that country school buildings often housed church services. In some instances, however, a community might have both a secular school and a church structure standing in fairly close proximity to each other, as in the Tallin area, west of Callaway and south of Arnold. Moreover, there were places where a church had its own school. One instance is St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, located six miles north of Falls City. It is a small cluster of buildings with a still-active church. The school was closed two years ago. Its students attend the district school just west.

A similar church and school combination was situated at Friedenshau (meaning Valley of Peace) near the Little Blue River, four miles west and two north of Hebron. Here, Mrs. Katherine Kliker, now County Superintendent of Schools of Dawson County, Lexington, received all of her grade school education from her father, the sole teacher in the one-room school which offered instruction in grades one through eight to a body of students often ranging from twenty to twenty-five. The church and the school were closely connected.

Social activities that originated in the church generally took place in the school building. These included recreational games, mission festivals involving the church alone and those outside it as well, Ladies' Aid meetings, quilting bees once a month, and quarterly meetings of the church elders.

This community of Germans formed a tight little enclave. Mrs. Kliker recalls that contacts outside it were infrequent, remembering that she and others taunted children from the public, district school. Whereas the integrity of this school brought them such blessings as the religious instruction and the advantages of studying under a really good scholar and musician, her father, times came when it worked against them, especially in the period of World War I. Then, they learned it was well not to speak German in public, as they had been doing, and not even to let their German accent be heard. The school dropped German in the 1920's but the church services retained that language until World War II. This conflict, Mrs. Kliker suggested, was the largest single factor in the assimilation of German-Lutherans into the common American culture. All wanted to be good American citizens and found, when they went as workers to the war industries, that it behooved them to give up the German language.[15]

Just south of Shelton, across the Platte River, the Derman school sits, encompassed by trees, in a hamlet of four or five families. Appearing well-kept on neatly trimmed grounds, it is large enough to have had seventy-five pupils at one time but is now abandoned. Its ten or twelve potential students go to the Shelton City Schools. The brick schoolhouse was constructed in 1914 and was, in the words of Clifford Woodman, who attended it beginning in 1917, the main amusement center for people around. It housed literaries and even had a home talent club which started up in 1915. One play given was "The Irish

Detective." There were debates, often on political questions. One in fun debated the merits of the horse and buggy versus the automobile. They had spelling bees and organized small instrumental bands.

In time, the population dropped in this district that lies along the south side of the Platte River. The number of farmsteads declined. Once, there may have been a family living on every eighty or one hundred and sixty acres, but this is no longer the case since the farms are larger. Within a mile of his house, Mr. Woodman noted, three farmsteads have disappeared in the last decade or so. At last, the school closed and the furnishings were sold at auction. An alumni group took it over in 1974. At the time of its annual picnic, members donate money to keep the building maintained.[16] For the most part, it is the older former students who attend and keep the spirit of community alive.

Mrs. Lorraine Englebrecht now teaches in a small country school just a few miles west of Ogalalla but once taught in the Sand Hills area between that city and Arthur. In earlier times, she suggests, everyone lived so far from town that they had to find their social life locally. For instance, all congregated for church and Sunday school services in the small frame schoolhouses. Once a month, the young people of the community would put on a program at the school, after having practiced at the homes around. Pie socials and box suppers were big events. A girl or woman would bring a lunch for two in a brightly-decorated box after which heated bidding for it took place. Generally, the teacher's box was in great demand, and there were times, Mrs. Englebrecht recalls, when a bidder, caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment, bid more than he had money to for and had to sell something in order to settle accounts. Not unlike our present times, when a school becomes in part an entertainment facility with

its athletics and musicals, the teacher was expected to supply the programs. This custom is, in fact, not unknown among country school expectancies even now, I suggest. So, she had Christmas programs at times, at others skits with patriotic emphases, and recitations of poems written by such poets as Longfellow ("Evangeline"), Emerson, and Poe ("The Raven").[17]

In 1955, the commissioners of Arthur County asked Wilsie Cross, son of an early-day rancher, to be its acting county superintendent. He accepted the position and has held it for more than twenty-five years. Previously, he taught a country school for five years before moving into the Arthur city schools for another five.

The family ranch was ten miles northwest of Arthur in a pasture area common to the Sand Hills, and the schoolhouse of the area did serve in earlier times as a community center. Dances were the occasion once a month. The musicians were local people, supplying with violins, pianos, trumpets, and guitars the music for round and square dances and the schottische. Debates were frequently the substance of the literaries. One question, Mr. Cross recalls, was whether a tractor or horses proved more profitable to a farmer. The subject evoked considerable warmth. A debater against the tractor said one had always to run to town on his horse to get parts for a broken-down machine.

Now, few schools have literaries. That is unfortunate, Mr. Cross decides. Should one go out to his home area ten miles from Arthur, one would not find enough people for a meeting since the county as a whole has been losing population and great numbers of people have left.[18] It is the problem of the Denman school transferred from the Platte River area to the Sand Hills.

The pasture and hay lands of Rock County supply another insight into

school-community relationships. About forty miles or so southeast of Bassett, Miss Audrey Schoenbeck teaches a country school. After having graduated from Concordia Teachers' College at Seward, in 1972, then teaching in Fort Lauderdale Florida, next studying and teaching Japanese language and culture in Japan, she returned to this country and to the serenity of southern Rock County. The last move was a change for her. For one matter, she discovered that her field of allusions when teaching did not always fit that of the Sand Hills youngsters. Their backgrounds were not necessarily hers. Something, Miss Schoenbeck said, having to do with the great distances and the long winters, for example, produced a different kind of character among these Rock County children. She did not denigrate it and did not really explain how the environment wrought this character. One attempts, I suggest, to account for a person's character in terms of "place"at great risk of error.

Her school building was not used as a community center. Citizens' Band radios took its place in a sense. Whenever a truck or car went by, she could hear the crackling of its C.B. If a child did not reach his home on time after school—and the distance could be ten miles—a call for help would go out on the CB and in time the child would be found. When she sought to interview for her position, a board member told her to stay right where she was. He would locate the other board members on his CB, and they would come to her. One has only to travel through these grasslands to realize how sound his advice was. The patrons strongly support the school. They are sold on education, but they rarely convene at the once-used community center.[19]

Miss Schoenbeck's students may write poetry in their small school deep in the Sand Hills of Rock County, but they don't recite that original

poetry at the community literaries or box socials. And, one doubts that they read it over the CB's that now serve as a cementing influence. Who has attended recently an event similar to those once featured in the country schools—box socials, spelldowns, cake-walks, poetry reciting, and debates?

Few indeed, for it is not only CB's that have replaced the country school as social center. The television set pulls its listeners to a different center much farther away than the district school, to be sure. Another center for country people is the basketball game at the local high school. Such events with their hoopla and glamour, where the spectator can be just that, a spectator, seem far more attractive than putting on a skit on a schoolhouse state with bed sheets as draw curtains. For these moderns, the magnet that has pulled them away is a distant one.

How, asked Thoreau, can the bird sing if it has no forest? There can be no community activity in the district school if the desire is gone, and soon the building as well. Add the fact of change of interest to that of depopulation, a result of the first tractor's being driven out on the land, and one can understand why the rural school as community center is a matter, largely, of history. Of the schools discussed in this chapter, no more than two are standing today.

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Chapter III.

The Country School and the Americanization Process

In the previous chapter, I commented that the country school no longer serves the community as a center to the extent it did several decades past. Its function in Americanizing ethnic groups is also a matter of the past. The testimony of Dr. Anne Campbell, Commissioner of Education for the State of Nebraska, speaks to that point.

Born in Denver, Dr. Campbell grew up on a cattle ranch in Colorado where she attended a rural school. After high school graduation, she wanted to enroll in animal husbandry at Ft. Collins but could not gain entry because of being a woman. She went into education instead, gaining a major in physical education and a minor in mathematics. This detour into education was, she observes, a later satisfaction to her. Subsequently, after moving to Madison County, Nebraska, she taught, then in 1955 was asked to be County Superintendent of her home county where she had sixty-eight districts with schools ranging in student population from one or two each to twenty-five. In 1974, she came to the position she now holds. It is from this varied educational experience that she responds to the question of the rural school in the Americanization of ethnic groups in Nebraska.

Many immigrants to Madison County, Dr. Campbell notes, came in groups or families, but somehow never wished to be provincial; rather, they desired to be assimilated into the general American culture. So, although they were Swedish, Danish, or Czech, they hoped to become as "American" as possible, to participate in the melting-pot idea, a difference, she points out, from a current, prevailing notion of cultural pluralism. The country school in early times may then have been a factor serving these newly-arrived peoples to become assimilated into prevailing ways of doing things.

But, it does not now operate in that manner, for there are but few ethnic groups that have not been so assimilated either in Madison County or in the entire state in the areas served by rural schools. For instance, she explains, the largest Hispanic group in the state is not in the Scottsbluff area, as commonly supposed, but in Omaha. Those in the western part have been "settled-out," so to speak,she suggests. True, a pocket or so of ethnic groups, or perhaps a family, but no large concentrated population exists to be served by rural schools.[1]

A study, Statistics and Facts about Nebraska Schools, prepared by the Nebraska Department of Education under the direction of Harley Pfeiffer, lends specificity to Dr. Campbell's remarks. For example, in Sheridan County in northwest Nebraska, there are thirty-two country schools with a total of eighty members of "minority" races, namely Asian-Pacific Islander, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Black. Of these, sixty-seven are in the third category, logical in that Sheridan County touches the southern limits of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation of South Dakota. Another example is Cherry County, the largest in the state, which has only thirteen students of a minority race attending thirty country schools. Of the thirteen students, eleven are American Indian/ Alaskan Native. Like Sheridan County, Cherry County touches the South Dakota line and is close to an Indian Reservation, the Rose Bud. A more dramatic example is Custer County, also a large county. It numbers for Class I schools a total of six minority students. Holt, also large, has around forty-five country schools that serve but seven members of minority races. Obviously, country schools today are a negligible factor in Americanizing members of minority races that may not already be in that condition.[2]

Let us consider a single exception, that of Mrs. Englebrecht's school (already cited) west of Ogalalla. Occasionally, a family of farm workers will move into the district to work in the sugar beet fields much as Germans-from-Russia did in the Scottsbluff area several decades earlier. The students attend

her school often for brief periods of time. The regular Anglo students receive them well and help them to get further accustomed to Nebraska culture, if they have arrived lately in this country. When they attend, the teacher takes up the Latin-American unit of study so that her Anglo students can have the advantage of picking up a few words of Spanish and, occasionally, learn something additional about the culture. It is a good exchange, she is certain, beneficial to both groups. This is one example of the isolated pockets Dr. Campbell alluded to.[3]

The rural school's contribution to Americanizing Nebraska's ethnic peoples is a matter of yesteryear. I will deal with this influence in two categories—how writers and others not in that profession necessarily viewed the matter.

The Americanization of Hans Grimsen (previously alluded to) in a country school in Nebraska was a rough experience indeed, not like the gradual, benevolent process we will hear about later from Harry Younglund. The Grimsen's, a family in Winther's Take All to Nebraska, came to Nebraska from Denmark via Massachusetts. Their experience in that Eastern state was trying enough to make them somewhat apprehensive about a newer land. It was especially evidenced when young Hans' mother had forebodings about his going to school. Hans anticipated it; swinging his red tobacco-box lunch bucket and dressed by his mother in short pants, topped by a cream-colored blouse, and wearing black stockings with newly polished shoes, his yellow curls freshly combed, he soon found school to be anything but a pleasant experience.

First of all, a group of boys, knowing the Grimsen children were foreigners, accosted them rudely. One tried to get Hans' pail, so different

from their plain syrup buckets. He averted the attempt but it led to another boy's punching Alfred, Hans' brother. A fight ensued. It was broken up by the teacher's ringing the bell. Quite unlike the normal picture of a seventeen-year-old girl, Hans' teacher was middle-aged. She was tall and dressed in gray calico. When she talked, she rolled her upper lip back from her teeth so that her gums showed. They were ugly and red.

Then school took up. There was Bible reading followed by their singing "Way Down upon the Swanee River." Hans, with only a few English words in his vocabulary was nonplussed by it all. He did notice the alternating red and green-chalked motto on the board and thought it pretty, although he did not comprehend the motto, also in English: "That truth will prevail should encourage us in our trials." After opening exercises, instruction in the alphabet began. Finally, the teacher asked for some one to recite a poem from memory. She received no response. At last, Hans volunteered and gave her two lines of a poem in Danish before laughter stopped him. She quieted the room down and told him, in the least cruel account of her Winther chose to give, that he must not speak in a foreign language, only in English. The boy had learned, at the cost of shame and confusion, a hard lesson in becoming Americanized. To top the miserable day off, the school bully, a man of twenty years, gave him the "flying jump," propelling him off his feet a distance of twenty feet, throwing Hans on his face. His brothers took him home at once. Such was the less-than-gentle indoctrination of one fictive Danish immigrant in an early Nebraska country school.[4]

The rural school schoolteacher comes off even less well in a later chapter of Winther's book. One, a Dane, was "plump, attractive, laughter-loving, and kind." From her, Hans came to expect decent treatment. Winther gives her tenure scant treatment and settles on a "self-complacent, little woman about

twenty-five years old." She wore a "hard, superior smile that seemed to be frozen on her face." In short, she was an autocrat without compassion for her students. For the slightest infraction of her rules, she would approach students from the back and whack them over the hands with a short stick. This was but one of her ways of tyrannizing over the children who soon grew to hate her. Amid such conditions, the Grimsen children did not assimilate themselves with the "American" children there. While the children's experiences in this rural seat of learning are too extended to relate here completely, I conclude that Winther did not regard the rural school in this case as helping to Americanize the Danish children.[5]

In the previous chapter I called attention to the Nysted folk school which A. C. Nielsen attended. Just a half-mile east sat a two-room brick building, the public school. It was poorly maintained, not one to command respect for learning. In dry weather, the yard was quite dusty; in rainy times, it was a morass of mud. Yet, in this building, as in so many others around the United States, the most important work, E Pluribus Unum was done, as Nielsen stated it. The school unconsciously made Americans of Danish children.

Whereas a few "misguided" teachers of the vacation school told them they owed their primary allegiance to Denmark, the public school, which required studies in American history, not Danish, helped make them American. For these relative newcomers, it was not the wars of the Danes against the Germans in the school games. It was those of Lexington and Concord, of Bunker Hill, of Gettysburg, and San Juan Hill. The American Patriots fought the British Redcoats. While this kind of progress was slow, and was accompanied by instances wherein outsiders, like a Polish family, felt Danish discrimination, generally the making of the one from many was done effectively in "the Little Red Schoolhouse," as Nielsen viewed the situation.[6] His account invites comparison with Winther's.

A third writer, Nellie Snyder Yost, treats of immigrant Swedish students in the Roten Valley School north of Gothenburg, in a way that leads one to conclude that immigrants and American children got along quite well in the pursuit of American ways. What distinctions existed were noted, of course, but the Swedish children were subject to only mild forms of teasing. nothing of the severity as pictured by Winther in the instance of Hans Grimsen. For instance, on seeing a stranger in school, the teacher went over to her and attempted to be kind to this new student who could not speak English. Other students helped her to learn their language and found but gentle humor in such a mishandled phrase as, "Huh, I don't feel no smell," or "Oh, please let me use you to leg," when the speaker wanted to lean on someone.[7]

Among people interviewed for "The Country School Legacy," there was a variety of testimony respecting the role of the rural school in Americanizing ethnic groups. Generally, however, it is more characteristic of the conclusions of Nielsen and Yost, as against those of Winther.

I noted that the Friedenshau parochial school consistently sponsored classes in the German language until the 1920's, so the school itself may not have been a major factor in Americanizing the predominantly German community there. Instead, Mrs. Eliker suggested, it was the intermixing of peoples mandated by World War II.[8] I suggest, however, that when the school began in the 1920's to offer instruction in English, while the church services were still conducted in German, the language must have been something of a factor.

Author Mrs. Manion, cited in Chapter I, commented that the Jules Sandoz children learned English in a sod schoolhouse, District 125, in Sheridan County.

She was asked about language problems. In response, she questioned the present-day practice of mandatory bilingual classes. Students in the early-day schools learned English via "exposure." The teacher helped them, of course, and they mastered their lessons and became well-read people. In her first year of teaching, she had a Swiss family which lived southeast of Rushville. They spoke German at home but soon picked up English. In this first term, which Mrs. Manion taught at the age of sixteen, she taught several children from Holland, and they, too, picked up English. She taught some Indian children, singling out one boy who did quite well for her and became the first member of his family ever to graduate from high school. These children would sometimes endure teasing but, otherwise, there were no particular problems.[9]

Mrs. Caroline Pifer, sister of Mari Sandoz, described how her sister sought to complement the "exposure" method. Once four youngsters came from Vienna to her school. They spoke Bohemian, so Mari ordered translation books. While the speakers of Bohemian learned English, the Americans picked up some Bohemian. One of these youngsters mastered the first eight grades of readers in one year. The teacher could readily sympathize with the immigrant children since she knew no English when she first went to grade school.[10]

Two other residents of the Gordon-Chadron area recounted their experiences and feelings on having to learn the English language while in school. Jack Lindeken spoke only German when he began but made the transition to English readily because his teacher could also speak German. Mrs. Lean Delsing attended school on her father's homestead northeast of Hemingford. Because nearly all of the settlers were German, nearly everyone in the school spoke that language, excepting for the teacher. Mrs. Delsing commented: "We all talked German and then when we went to school we had to learn to talk English. We all had a

heck of a time getting started. . . . It wasn't as bad for me as it was for the older ones because when they went to school then they wanted to teach us English." An inability to speak the common language led to Mr. John Oldenburg's (Gordon, NE) being called a "dumb Dutchman" when he began school in the 1890's. He took the teasing in good humor.[11]

Harry Younglund of Stromsburg, Nebraska, had no bitter memories of his assimilation as a full-blooded Swedish boy, though born in America, into American ways. He was born northeast of Stromsburg to farmers and received his only formal education in a country school, later augmenting it with home study. He could read before he started school, but, like most Swedish children, had trouble in acquiring the proper English accent. Although Mr. Younglund experienced the English language in school and Swedish in Sunday school, he concluded that he had no particular difficulty. He and his contemporaries soon dropped their sense of belonging to an ethnic group. He notes that now some attempts have being made to revive that sense through Swedish festivals and the like. His assimilation, he suggests, was a gradual process. One followed one's neighbors into the mainstream of American culture and hardly noticed the transition.[12]

Clement W. Christensen lives in Boyd County on the same land on which his parents, newly arrived from Denmark, settled. The son narrowly missed attending school in a soddy. Before he began school, he could talk English, Danish, and German, his parents having learned German when they stopped over at West Point, Nebraska, before settling in the Lynch area. He picked it up also from some Germans from Russia who were in that locality. The neighbors talked English and English was also spoken at school, so he learned it in that way, although the family at home spoke Danish. A few Bohemians lived in the area. Mr. Christensen observes that he could not understand them. In this mix of

peoples, he never saw any discrimination practiced. They were, Mr. Christensen remarked, "all the same kind of people, but they grunt different." All were well assimilated. Apparently, the rural school helped in that direction.[13]

An interview with Wilsie Cross (previously cited) relative to the role of the country school today helping to Americanize Nebraska's ethnic groups will punctuate remarks cited earlier by Dr. Campbell.

In the State Department of Education report earlier cited, Arthur County, for which Mr. Cross is Superintendent, has none in the four groups considered "minority." It is not listed. All the inhabitants of his county have lived in it for years. If there ever was a problem in an immigrant group's becoming Americanized, Mr. Cross observes, it would have been long ago, well back in the early 1900's when much of the land was first claimed for settlement. Therefore, the country schools of Arthur County, situated in an interior position within the state, do not function as an Americanizing agency in a population that numbers people who first settled the land and have remained.[14]

As stated earlier by Nielsen, the country school often helped ethnic groups to become Americanized. Both he and Mr. Younglund suggest that this process occurred without any one's making a conscious effort to effect it. There was no oath-taking, Nielsen suggested. When one considers that ethnic groups to be served by country schools settled in a body they might have tended to remain isolated in a small area unless some extraneous force broke their insularity. It is logical that the schoolteacher from outside who spoke English could well have been such a force, aided by the American history texts of which Nielsen spoke. Of course, other movements—the World War of which Mrs. Eliker spoke, and the influx of other people noted by Mr. Younglund—helped break up the integrity of such communities. Still, when one reflects how education in general makes one more universal in ideas, then one might with some good

reason credit the rural schools.

Was there a heavy price paid in terms of human feelings when children of ethnic parents began the Americanization process? If Winther was basing his fictional account of Hans Grimsen on actual experience, then the country school could have been an ordeal for others as for Hans. It is possible that for Nielsen, Younglund, and Christensen their recalled effortless transition was truly a hectic experience which eventual well-being and time have made oblivious to them. Picture a youngster today coming into a classroom speaking a language strange to his peers. He would be made to feel that he was a bit different and anguish would be a share of his lot.

Whatever the case may have been with thousands of country school children, without doubt the rural school was a major factor in bringing them into the main currents of American life.

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Chapter IV.

The Curriculum of the Country School

As mentioned earlier, people concerned with the current malaise in education frequently turn back in time to see what existed there that might help current conditions. One such attempt was that of Stan Hartzler as recorded in a Chicago Tribune Service story carried in the February 17, 1981, issue of the Omaha World-Herald. Now a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, Hartzler, while a mathematics teacher in Illinois, began to use old mathematics textbooks and noticed that the older the text the more contests his students won until, using those of 1900, they had taken five conference championships. At Austin, he began to concentrate on collecting and studying the mathematics texts of days gone by.

I need not assess the value of Hartzler's findings. His account can propel us similarly into an investigation of the rural school curriculum of several decades past.

While the idea that instruction should be both informative and moral did not originate with rural people of seventy-five years ago, it loomed large in their thinking. Consider this instance as related in a letter sent me about Leroy P. Grundy, once a teacher and county superintendent in the Falls City area:

> In those days the public schools taught the health hazards of alcoholic beverages and how they were a risk to family and social life, as well. I have never forgotten his admonishment to the class. These are not his exact words—"Boys, (he addressed the boys only, because in those days, middle class women and girls shunned alcoholic drinks) it is the easiest thing in the world to keep from being a drunkard; when temptation comes, just refrain from bending your elbow. Never take that first drink."
>
> At one time in his life he had been an agent for an organ company and traveled through the country selling them. He had sold one to a farm

family and as soon as possible had delivered it to the farm home. It was evening when the organ was unloaded into the parlor and the husband had not yet returned from town, so when the wife invited Mr. Grundy to spend the night with them, he accepted because he wanted to stay near the organ since he had not been paid a nickel on it as yet. Mr. G. retired for the night when the husband came home, roaring drunk. He wouldn't go to bed, but prowled around shouting and cursing. He would go outside and bark and howl like dogs. He went into the parlor and seeing the organ, said, "I am going to get the axe and chop that d____d peeannie to pieces." When those words came through the floor of Mr. G's bedroom, the chills ran up his spine. Fortunately the drunk's attention was diverted to something else and he did not carry out his threat. After an hour or so, he quieted down and went to sleep. The next morning he had slept off his irrationality and after breakfast wrote a check to Mr. G. and sent his teenage son along to the bank for identification. The banker told Mr. G. that this man had recently inherited money and the farm and was drinking it up as fast as possible. Thus Mr. G. gave a graphic illustration of what might happen if one took that first drink.[1]

Someone once stated that the single greatest influence in getting prohibition adopted nationally was the Methodist Church. Given the fact of such dramatic arguments as Grundy's above, one might also put in a word for the country school teacher as a potent force. Didacticism was the order of the day in other respects. Most grade school students prior to the 1930's can remember the story of Abraham Lincoln's walking several miles to return a borrowed book, and they can recall George Washington's "Rules of Conduct" governing such untoward actions as tying one's shoes in public. And, they read with pleasure and a sense of prophecy how the boys in Horatio Alger's books succeeded and how they also might if they but applied themselves, and had a bit of luck at the same time.

The McGuffey's reading series comes into most conversations on the subject of moral instruction in public schools and is often held up as a model for modern schools. Without question, these books in widespread use pleased the moral palates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Lesson II of the Second Eclectic Reader, Revised Edition, 1879, a young girl of about seven

is pictured in an idylic natural setting, lying on the ground reading a book. In a story, "Bubbles," three boys blow soap bubbles down on a cat and, in so doing, learn the various colors reflected in the bubble. The lesson is one that delights and instructs quite like an expressed aim for literature in the eighteenth century. Willie writes a letter to Santa Claus asking for a rubber ball that will not break his "Momma's" window. The Third Eclectic Reader is more didactic. One poem is "Speak Gently," a stanza of which will suffice here:

> Speak gently to the aged one;
> Grieve not the care-worn heart:
> The sands of life are nearly run;
> Let such in peace depart.

In another selection a father taught his sons to stick together so no one could cheat them out of their inheritance later. To make his lesson clear, he asked each of them to break a bundle of sticks as a whole. None could. He then broke each one separately, and, to make sure his lesson was clear, added:

> But if the bond of union be broken, it will happen to you just as it has to these sticks, which lie here broken on the ground.[2]

Several older teachers interviewed recalled having studied from the McGuffey series.[3]

These readers, even the First Eclectic Reader, placed diacritical markings on the words it isolated for special study, as did others, as if to stress the importance of phonics in reading, an emphasis,one recalls, that Rudolf Flesch found wanting in his attack on current reading practices in Why Johnny Can't Read, published in the early 1950's. Vocabulary study was also deemed important for the study words were defined. Each story had study questions, presumably to whet the students' interest and to assist the teacher.

As to moral instruction, several older teachers seemed to recall a shift in the textbooks from such New England poets as Longfellow and Whittier to those less instructive and more lyrical. While none could pinpoint the period when this occurred nor the reasons for deemphasizing moralistic literature, it came, I suggest, in the late 1920's and early 1930's under the impetus of the notion that "thou shall not indoctrinate," a result of the scientific attitude towards education that, possibly owing something to John Dewey's teachings, argued that the various modes of behavior should be laid out for the students' independent examination and free choice. Admittedly, moral instruction that follows one line, that of hard work, of saving, etc., does not examine alternatives, and is not subject to inquiry is restrictive and hardly permeated with the scientific spirit. These admonitory lines from Longfellow's "Psalm of Life"—"Be not like dumb-driven cattle/Be a hero in the strife"—are unmistakably imperative.

Schools Taught Morality!

Salutary or not, another kind of shift took place in types of literature studied. Miss Berniece Anderson (previously cited) noticed in her forty-year tenure that the "classics" of literature came to be neglected. At one time, especially when she was a student in a country school in Polk County, she read Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," Henry Clay's orations, and Daniel Webster's speeches. She knew Longfellow's poems and something of Emerson. During her last years of teaching, however, she was teaching the students of Central City stories that dealt, for instance, with the problems of ethnic groups, attempts, that is, to teach Nebraska children something of the pluralism of America culture. Others have commented similarly. A visit to the Harold Warp School in the Pioneer Village Museum at Minden is instructive. One can

see book titles by Thomas Carlyle and Shakespeare on the shelves of this schoolhouse closed in 1947. This is not to say that these were ever read. Senator Carl T. Curtis (previously cited) remembered that the poetry he studied in the early grades of rural school was written by New England poets:

> They had to live in Boston or within fifty miles of it, and I think that was because they had a corner on the publishing business. They were great literary men. Yes, in grade school it was Longfellow and Bryant. I thought of "To a Waterfowl" today when I saw the birds [sandhill cranes].

When asked if contemporary rural school students could read such authors as Carlyle and Shakespeare, Mrs. Englebrecht (previously cited) said they could, if they had good teachers in a good reading program for several years. Unfortunately, she added, modern reading standards have "gone backward," principally because schools have lost the "good old texts" that stressed vocabulary and comprehension skills. The present reading texts have little meat in them, she judged. The fact that her students can read from one to two grades ahead of their own level is bad, for they need more depth than they are getting. This condition has come about, Mrs. Englebrecht decided, because textbooks are aimed at the slow learner's level and the better students are therefore deprived of challenging material. For memorization, she still prefers Longfellow and Emerson, mainly because the new poems are too obscure and do not relate closely enough to nature.

An advertisement in The Nebraska Teacher, p. 303, V. 13, 1906, may be pertinent to this point. For sums ranging from five cents up, a teacher could select from The Lakeside Classics. Third grade books included an adapted version of Robinson Crusoe. Some fourth grade selections were Rip Van Winkle and The Swiss Family Robinson. Fourth graders who could work through Irving's descriptions would be doing well by today's standards. Bryant's "Thanatopsis" and Hawthorne's "The Great Stone Face" would be over the heads of most fifth grade students of the present day, I suggest. They would find "To him who in the

love of Nature holds/Communion with her visible forms, she speaks/A various language" quite difficult, and may have in 1906 for that matter. Seventh graders might notice Goldsmith's Deserted Village, Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner, and Tennyson's Enoch Arden listed for them. Any one of these would tax all but a few of modern day school children of the seventh grade. One must remark that these books were for collateral reading. It is likely that not all students in that early time could read them either. Apparently the expectancy existed that students should read the "classics."

We can not determine whether curriculum and textbook makers of the pre-1930's had Ben Jonson's notions in mind (from his Timber, or Discoveries) when they prescribed good literature. Jonson contended that a person could learn how to write by listening to the best speakers, by reading the best writers, and by much careful practicing of one's own style. I would suppose that curriculum people knew that one somehow learned from one's models in language in the same way one learned manners by the imitation of good examples. "Set a good example for your students," teachers often heard. The intellectual rigor required to read the classics could well have carried over into an intense care as to how one spoke or wrote.

The attention to phonics just noted made teachers aware of the need for proper diction properly enunciated. People were conscious of their speech. They knew that a short "e" was pronounced like one, like an "eh." They insisted, if purists at all, that "elephant" be pronounced "ehl eh fant (as in fan)." If not, how could one then sound it out? This is somewhat distinct from our contemporary practice of "leveling" the second "e" and the "a" to "uh," the schwa. How can one spell from such a pronunciation? Earlier teachers

carefully placed the complete "ing" on the end of "running." Not to, was to be sloppy with one's enunciation. They were also proper in their use of pronouns, and led their students through the intricacies of when to use "who" and when to use "whom." They were especially negative on the use of "ain't" and would tell their students that no such word existed, only to be confuted when students found the ostracized word in their dictionaries, not choosing to observe that it was denoted sub-standard English.

Himself a product of a rural school in northern Custer County, William Christy, now an English teacher in Sidney, editor and writer, bases a story, "The Ain't Box," on a rural schoolteacher's obsessive hatred of this word. In a practice that must have been common, she had students who heard anyone use "ain't" to place the culprit's name in a box labeled "the ain't box." A month later, the teacher would count the names. Whoever had the most slips with his name in the box lost the contest.[4] Her concern for the right word served to spark a short story that enabled Christy to deal with other features of the country school. Most other teachers shared this preoccupation with proper diction. Present-day teachers of English need not wonder why it is that from those who should know better, even lawyers and doctors, one is likely to hear, "Oh, an English teacher? I'll have to watch what I say." There is a long history beyond such comments.

One might speculate as to why the country school teacher wanted her students, and herself, to speak pure and undefiled English. Reason must have told her that the thou-shalt-nots she was teaching were in common use around the homes of many of her patrons. It must have told her also that most of her graduates would go from her classroom directly into picking corn and putting up hay where their choice of the right word was likely neither to interfere with their daily bread or their rising socially. Whether or not she put on the

mantle, she was considered as the representative of "culture," and may have conceived herself in that light because the community wanted her to. We hear often that immigrants wished their children to speak English properly for reasons of economic and social benefit, and it is quite likely that others saw such speech as a means of rising in society so that their children would not be, one presumes, _ Silas Laphams. The demand for books on diction paralled the rise in status of so many people. It was true then and it is true now that social and economic motives can make many want to acquire an "instant" proper diction or an improved vocabulary.

After interviewing many people who came through that regimen of reading in the classics and enforced care in choosing words, I have to respect their modes of expression. While I concede that for many their rural school teaching and attendance are far behind them, and intervening factors may have affected their language for the good, still I find a most exemplary manner of speaking where the few years alone of country school experience would seem not to warrant it. One might see here an argument for intellectual rigor and discipline practiced on worthy objects.

Invariably, the question of back-to-the-basics comes up in any consideration of present-day curriculum in schools, for this has been a possible remedy in the minds of many to make up for alleged deficiencies in education at the present time. They talk of prescriptive grammar, of spelling lists, of a return to the McGuffey Readers, and of stricter standards in penmanship. These, they believe, were the characteristics of the country school.

When a country school teacher is asked whether he or she would favor a return to the "basics," the reply without exception is, "We never left them."

They point to the rural school as being the bastion of three mainstays of the basics--reading, writing, and arithmetic. Such was Wilsie Cross's (previously cited) reply. He thought students needed a great deal of reading and especially written composition. He told of his efforts to emphasize it. Nearly twenty years ago, the Board of Education for the City of Arthur became dismayed that so many of Arthur's students were averaging a "D" in the college freshman composition courses. They hired him to coordinate grade and high school training in composition, with the hopes that the averages would climb. Now, working in that role, he supervises this one feature of a return to the basics, so-called. The program is successful.

Former career teacher, Miss Berniece Anderson (previously cited) commented that she had never left off teaching the basics. In her early career in the late 1920's, she taught subjects that were all "basic." Later, the "enrichment" courses came along which, she thought, took emphasis away from the basics. She continued, nevertheless, to teach phonetics, the alphabet, and the fundamental processes in arithmetic. She was at first frightened by the "new math," but did adjust to it, though continuing to stress such drills as multiplication tables. In grammar, she taught the parts of speech and correct usage. Her training in traditional grammar helped her to learn Latin, she recalled, once required at Kearney State College of all teachers.

Robert L. Conger of Kearney was moved by publicity surrounding "The Country School Legacy" to write a paper on his rural school experiences, dedicated to his wife, Mildred. A former entertainer, Conger grew up in Blaine County and attended the first ten grades in District 15, south of the Calamus River. It discontinued school in 1966. After opening exercises which might consist of Bible reading or an ongoing reading of a Zane Grey novel, followed

by the flag salute in unison or reciting the preamble to the United States Constitution, students would turn to what one might term the basics—"Major emphasis was placed on reading, spelling, phonics, mathematics, and English." 5

In an earlier citation, Mrs. Englebrecht recommended schools return to a higher level of reading materials, suggesting the literary classics. Some might term such a regression a return to the basics. In general, she maintained she had never quit the basics. In mathematics, she took up the "new math" but retained the old as well and, in effect, taught two kinds. Now she teaches the new math in some ways but will do so only if students know the traditional arithmetic. She favors memory work in poetry, especially in her various school programs, i. e. patriotic poetry during the month of February. She often teaches technical grammar, even to conjugating verbs, noting that modern English programs that emphasize literature do not provide adequately for grammar. Primarily, she shows students how a sentence grows out of its two main parts, the subject and the verb. This practice, one notes, while a part of traditional grammar, is not unlike the new "generative" grammar with its talk of "deep structures." As a final point in regard to curriculum, Mrs. Englebrecht contends that too much watching of television at home, particularly the horror shows, is harmful. They upset the students even into the next day. While educational television displays some good things, she concludes, she has never really found time for television in her classroom.

Joseph E. Thackrey, now living in Athens, Ohio, wrote to Andrew Gulliford, Project Director for "The Country School Legacy," recounting some of his experiences in Cherry County, Nebraska. Born in 1898, twenty miles south of

Valentine, Thackrey began living in a sod house on a homestead in 1906. Two years later School District 109 was organized and school began in the ranch house of J. C. Reese. The students had no desks and but one three-legged stool and a squeaky rocker. Depending on the weather, the fall roundup, branding, stock feeding, and other chores, the seven students attended regularly, one riding nearly nine miles. Classes consisted, wrote Thackrey, mainly of reading and arithmetic, certainly the core of the basics. He did not speak either of music or of art nor of other enrichment subjects. The following year the V Bar V Ranch donated an unused buggy shed which was remodeled for a school. It was taught by Mr. Thackrey's aunt, Cora Thackrey, who had a degree from Kansas State University, then Kansas State Agricultural College. Classes then included grammar, history, and geography. Education in those times and in that place was "strictly for results with little regard for comfort or cosmetic effect." In 1912, when his Aunt Cora was elected county superintendent, the family moved to Valentine.[6]

Mrs. Helen Waits, Tryon, began teaching on a normal training certificate soon after she graduated from Gandy High School, situated just east of Stapleton, Nebraska, in 1935. She taught intermittently until 1955 when she became county superintendent of McPherson County, serving until 1975. When she taught, she asked her students to memorize many poems, and to write poetry and short stories. In grammar, they diagrammed sentences. She did not understand the "new math," she remarked, but believed in a strong background in arithmetic. She emphasized reading. The education the children of ranchers received couldn't be beaten, she points out. It was the background of their civilization. Her husband, she suggested, had only a rural school education augmented by experience and he became quite successful.[7]

Would contemporary readers recognize the subjects taught in the early part of the present century? If they were to examine a list of subjects teachers were to face examination on in 1920, as taken from a Nemaha County Superintendent's publication, they might wonder a bit at "Civics," but more at "Orthography" and "Mental Arithmetic." Orthography, a really important subject in earlier years and often regarded now as the sine qua non in education, was "spelling." It is a word that grew etymologically out of a Sanskrit root that meant growing and upright then standard, its present signification—standard writing. Mental arithmetic was working sans pencil or blackboard.

Some of the examination problems were difficult. Here are some sample questions worked out by the Nebraska Department of Certification in 1910:

> How many more fifths than fourths are there in 1000?
> A watch costs $70.00, and 2/5 of its cost is twice the cost of the chain. How much does the chain cost?
> A man bought 4/5 of a farm and sold 2/3 of the farm. What remained unsold was worth $2,000.00. What was the value of the farm?
> For 4 2/3 pounds of meat I pay 22 cents more than for 3 3/4 pounds. How much is it per pound?[8]

One empathizes with the sixteen-year-old girl as she nervously tries to solve such problems read to her, her career depending on correct answers, and all this for $35.00 a month!

The teacher of Senator Curtis (previously cited) asked her students less complex questions in mental arithmetic than those cited above:

> This teacher was quite good at it. She would say, "Class, add with me," and she'd say, "Add twelve to fourteen to thirteen to twenty-one," and so on. Then we would give her the answer. She'd go along like that a while then she'd say, "Now, add forty more, and subtract fifteen." I enjoyed it. It was good exercise.

Most of the teachers interviewed gloried on their admitted success in the basics. Few admitted to competency in teaching music as more than just

singing with an organ or piano, or a capella, if neither instrument nor musician were around. One or two taught note values, time and key signatures, and harmony. No one of the older teachers taught music appreciation in the classics. Songs for their choral singing were such as were found in "The Golden Book of Favorite Songs." These might be "Old Black Joe," "Home Sweet Home," and "America." The level of art instruction was probably lower. Most admitted their deficiencies in teaching painting. As a rule, they held up pictures to the window and traced. A few encouraged free-hand drawing. Through their small chapbooks of art classics—"The Angelus," "The Gleaners" "The Horse Fair"—they had a fairly high level of art appreciation. The fine arts' instruction obviously did not match their instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic.

For one former student, teachers had a problem in not integrating the several subjects. A comment by Dr. Fred Schroeder might introduce the concept. Writing about his rural school teaching experiences from the perspective of a university teacher, Schroeder comments:

> But the farther I travel from that quaint and fragrant beginning, the closer is my affinity to the goals of the resourceful and idealistic rural teacher for whom no subject, course or age was separated from its neighbors, and with whom the school day became an invitation to circles of experience, widening outward from the common room so that child, community, nature, books and imagination were unified in an adventure of growing and learning.[9]

As author of a book on the humanities and as a consultant in interdisciplinary studies, Schroeder was aware that in his rural school he was free to synthesize, combine, and compare. Neither history and geography, nor literature and history were separate subjects. Each had affinities with the other. To paraphrase Keats' phrase, the muses did dance together. Faced with having to work many classes into a short day, a teacher with an eye for resemblances could economically amalgamate the disciplines. Who would have a better opportunity to teach the youngster that the world is indeed one organism?

That former student was Harry Younglund (previously cited). His teachers failed to unify the world they presented to him. Each subject was separate. Each had its own pigeon-hole, Younglund suggested. Nothing was related to anything else. Rather than to integrate subject matter, his teachers seemed interested only in how many posts it took for a fence. They offered only practical education. After all, farm children were not supposed to know anything but practical matters. His instructors even neglected nature study so readily available to them. And, they could have had a science of ecology. But they didn't. It was a weak spot in his education. It was not until he left grade school, his only formal education, and read widely that he began to establish relationships. Did Younglund blame his teachers? Not really. He condemned school boards for hiring teachers as cheaply as they could get them. These were invariably girls of sixteen or seventeen who, once they got a few years experience and education, left for the town schools. In Younglund's comment on salaries, old-time country schoolteachers must hear this familiar refrain so often declared at hiring time—"We owe it to the taxpayers to get a teacher as cheap as we can."

It calls for a mature judgment to see what both Schroeder and Younglund did—that the world, though it has many parts, is of one piece. Not only that, as a first consideration, one needs to know pretty thoroughly those entities which have points in common. One could not expect so much of a girl of sixteen or nineteen. Still, one might argue with some justification that any alert teacher, driven by the necessity for connecting ideas and thereby reducing the number of recitations, would soon see that not only the muses but the content of all subjects might dance together. Yet, such a persuasive philosopher-poet as Emerson had to urge vigorously via essays and lectures that this principle pervaded the universe. So, he must have found a considerable amount of apathy towards it. It is possibly a universal condition.

As with Schroeder, my interest in noting the affinities that exist among all things has led me to an American Studies degree and to setting up classes in interdisciplinary studies. It began from teaching all subjects to several grades in a single classroom in rural schools in southeastern Kansas.

How, then, should one rate the curriculum of the country school of an early day? If indeed all things are relative, I conclude that in relation to the conditions under which it was offered it was successful. Those conditions were hardly favorable, however, judged by today's standards.

After securing the coveted certificate and suffering the tenseness of getting a contract, the teacher had to find a boarding place, often a difficult task, where the accommodations were often not especially comfortable. One teacher got room and board in a farm home in which the bed had a straw tick filled once a year from the strawstack. Many either rode a horse to school or they walked, arriving at the school house on cold days to build fires with cobs, coal, or cow chips, or, in several cases, from corn worth eight cents per bushel on the market. If the schoolyard had no well, she either brought water from her boarding place or carried it from a neighbor's well. She sometimes thawed hers and the students' lunches by carrying them from the freezing entry way to the area around the potbellied stove. Some schools in early times had few books. In some instances, not all the class members could use the same reading text.

This list of impediments, as incomplete as it is, makes the early-day teaching seem like a marvelous success story to those who have been accustomed to the idea that equipment and supplies are the major factors in implementing a course of study.

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Chapter V.

Teachers: Their Roles, Rules, and Restrictions

In Nebraska before high schools were available to them, young farm girls looked about for ways to make a living at a level higher than being house servants in farm homes or in the small towns. The thousands of rural schools springing up in the 1880's and thereafter offered them the careers they sought. From that time on, running nearly to the present day, the district school has put many young people into careers.

How were they certified to teach? In 1886, Kate Fanning received a "Second Grade" Certificate at Hastings. It was signed by H. E. Allyn and bore the following attestation:

> This certifies, that I believe Kate Fanning to be a person of good moral character, and that she has passed a satisfactory examination in all of the branches required by law and the regulations of the State Superintendent to entitle her to a SECOND GRADE CERTIFICATE. She is therefore qualified to teach in any District in this County, for one year from this date, unless this Certificate be sooner revoked.

Also on her certificate were the grades she had made in the examinations, all, incidentally, in the 90's but orthography and penmanship. Those were 88 and 85 respectively. Apparently, she never wrote on mental arithmetic, for no grade was listed in it. One examination showed her receiving a 9+ in "Theory and Art of Teaching," an indication that the professional education courses now in vogue in the training of elementary schoolteachers had then a small part.[1]

Mari Sandoz, born 1896 in Sheridan County, although beginning her education at the age of nine, early became interested in reading and writing. Following only four and one-half years of schooling, in 1912 at the age of seventeen, she passed the rural teachers' examination and signed a contract to teach school. She had neither graduated from the eighth grade nor attended high school.[2]

The early career of Mrs. Fay Christensen (previously cited), who was born about the same time as Mari Sandos, follows somewhat the same pattern as to certification. Mrs. Christensen attended nine grades of school in Wisconsin, then moved to Lynch, Nebraska, where she took the teachers' examinations. Having passed them, she taught District 34, south of Lynch on a "Third-Grade" Certificate. Like Mari Sandos, who left teaching to enroll at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Mrs. Christensen went to summer school, first to Fremont then to Wayne. Following another pattern familiar to early-day country school-teachers, she met her future husband at Highland School, his home district, and they became married.

In the same manner, Mrs. Iva Mundschenck (previously cited) first taught on a normal training certificate, then attended college during the summers as convenient. She took her high school courses in teacher training at Albion, Nebraska. A federal relief program in the 1930's financed extension work from the state university. Her first contract was from District 39 in Boone County in 1935-36. She was on trial for three months. If satisfactory, she would get a longer contract. She received the district's vote of confidence for that term and for many more in different schools, even one in Illinois in the late 1940's. She resigned in 1978-79 but in the fall semester of 1979-80, she accepted a position in District 75 of Greeley County. The great number of schools Mrs. Mundschenck taught is not really exceptional. It was a commonly accepted belief among country school patrons that two years was "about enough for a teacher in one place." It goes practically without saying that the itinerant nature of the position did little for a teacher's sense of permanence in her job. Thorstein Veblen's description of early women teachers as (I paraphrase loosely) a mob of mobile maidens seeking matrimony makes considerable sense. Being a

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farmer's wife would be more stable. Yet, Veblen's witty and alliterative comment aside, seeking matrimony is hardly an abnormal impulse.

Teaching a period of forty years sound like a long time. Actually, a country school teacher who graduated from high school at seventeen and went directly into teaching, picking up college hours in summer sessions, could chalk up even more than forty years in the classroom before normal retirement age. It is not unheard of that a teacher has worked fifty years, as earlier stated of Miss Grace Corners of Auburn.

Terming herself "an old maid schoolteacher" with forty years of experience in the classroom, Mrs. Berniece Anderson (previously cited) attended eight grades in a rural school. After she took the normal training courses in Stromsburg High School, she taught four years in the same school she had attended, teaching some of the same children with whom she had earlier been schoolmates. Her father had attended the same school.

An interesting matter came up prior to graduation. Although she had taught for thirty years, she had never taken a course in practice teaching, a requirement for graduation. The college permitted her to be supervised in her own school. The supervisor came out, sat in the back of the room, and thus both met the college requirement. She concluded her career in Central City, teaching there for seventeen years, and, ironically, supervising teachers for the college in Central City before she had passed the course herself.

Mrs. Anderson observed that the students in the normal training program at Stromsburg were highly motivated to work. They knew these were "the most important courses they were taking." They were aware they would have to pass state examinations in every subject they might later teach plus tests in the organization of rural schools, discipline, and public relations with rural people.

The courses and the examinations were rigorous and tiring.

The career of Mrs. Edna Peniska in respect to her preparation for teaching and certification is distinctive. She was born in 1907 of Indian parents on the Santee Sioux Indian Reservation in northeastern Nebraska, one of eleven children. At seven she enrolled in the mission school there and later attended Santee Normal which was designed to train people, she recalls, for living and was not a teacher training institution. She completed the twelfth grade. She then took one year of college in Oskaloosa, Iowa, so became eligible for a third-grade certificate, she states. Later she took education courses in Moline, Illinois. Her teachers' examinations covered seventeen areas. She wrote on nine in one day, passed them, then came home. Later she worked in private homes in Minneapolis, then married. Her husband became disciplinary officer at the Geneva (Nebraska) Indian School. When World War II came and brought with it a teacher shortage, she was importuned to teach. Mrs. Peniska's one year of college and her education courses stood her in good stead. She retired recently from teaching at the Santee Sioux Indian School.[3]

When asked about major changes she had observed in the Norfolk area from the time she began there until now, Dr. Anne Campbell (previously cited) pointed to differences in certification, some of which we have just observed—that a teacher might be certified with no high school schooling at all, as in the case of Mari Sandoz, or with quite little. Dr. Campbell recalled that first one could teach on a normal training certificate, then on twelve hours of college, then thirty, then sixty, then finally a bachelor's degree, now a requirement excepting for those holding a "life" certificate which is honored as a "grandmother's clause." Asked about the quality of work of early teachers who lacked college preparation, Dr. Campbell commented that they often did a good job. A range of abilities can be encountered among teachers at any time, she suggested.

Did these teachers do a good job? There is evidence that they did or could have, if one can base a judgment from the kinds of people they were. It is a difficult question to answer. Colleges can not adequately respond to it. They meet problems in evaluating their own instructors. Public schools have the same situation. They waver between evaluating the teacher as socializing agent or the teacher as content master. As I noted earlier, in evaluating the country schoolteacher, it is probably "character" in the broadest sense that is significant, and it is that quality that I find among so many of the present and former country schoolteachers I have interviewed. If character is present, beneficial results will likely follow.

The harsh and restricted life undergone by the rural schoolteacher in times ranging from the 1880's to the 1930's is often a matter of comment. To be sure, she often lived in primitive conditions, sleeping on a straw-tick mattress, chilling in a back bedroom, or being asked to sleep with a visitor as John G. Neihardt recalled, walking to school, and so on. The life was harsh, as I shall note later. Was it as restricted, however, as often depicted? Was the schoolteacher often considered as a community chattel?

A "composite" Mattie Simmons commented that she drew $35.00 per month in 1885 but would have that amount reduced if school was canceled due to bad weather of if many of her students happened to be in the fields. She addressed herself to the question of her private life:

> My dress, hours, and habits were strictly regulated for the protection of my students. I was to set a perfect, or nearly perfect, example. Some contracts in those days even regulated courting, including the number of evenings that the teacher could go "out." She must be in by 9:30 or 10 p.m. A drink of alcohol or a puff of smoke was grounds for automatic dismissal. There were few married schoolmarms.
>
> Helpful hints for the teacher later appeared in The Nebraska Teacher,

first issued in September, 1898. We muddled through that somehow. The magazines carried instances of teachers being dropped for dancing and card playing. It noted that married women were discriminated against as were Catholics.

Some school boards were said to be concerned because young lady teachers seemed overanxious for husbands, having company too much to do their homework.

An editorial warned of bad breath and body odor, suggesting that a teacher brush his or her teeth three times a day and spend 60 rather than 15 cents on laundry.

Nebraska parents thought the teacher could supply a good example toward a better life than theirs for their children, Mattie Simmons concluded.[4]

The composite Mattie Simmons commented on conditions in 1885 as taken from the written record. On the basis of interviews of teachers who were in their classrooms not much earlier than 1920, I find her depiction a bit strong, if not dramatic.

No one of more than twenty teachers replied that they were considered as the property of the community. Mrs. Mae Manion (previously cited) did remark that contracts stipulated that the teacher, in addition to doing the janitor work and conducting the pledge of allegiance to the flag, was not to be married. The place for a married woman was commonly thought to be in the home. Mrs. Helen Waits (previously cited) contract required her to live in the district. The community did not want a married woman teacher. Should one become pregnant, it did not think it seemly that she should appear before the children, overlooking, I suggest, the circumstance that those children's mothers could become pregnant at home. The community, Mrs. Waits noted, looked to the teacher as a person of good morals and good report. Mrs. Berniece Anderson recalled that her patrons were pleasant and friendly. There was"none of that non-dating, not getting out of the house business." What the patrons required of her was not as bad as some of the jokes or extreme statements she had heard. A teacher should be above

criticism at any rate, Miss Anderson believed.

If, in the latter years of the nineteenth century, teachers were often restricted, it should not be surprising to us. It was the Victorian age when the public at large believed in a strict code of morality for decent women. Schoolteachers would naturally be subject to the ideals held by society. If the age asked more of women, and sought guarantees in their contracts, holding the threat of dismissal over their heads, such is understandable, the spirit of the times taken into account. Another thought on the idea of restriction, if it did occur, is that the public likes to have a voice in the affairs of its public servants. The force that a homesteader twenty miles out might exert on his county officers would be negligible indeed, and lighter still on the governor. But, he could make his voice heard in his home school district. The country school teacher was the only servant of the public over whom he could have any say.

Fewer restrictions applied to the teachers of the 1920's. One reason may have been a kind of freeing-up of strict moral codes in general in which rural schoolteachers would logically share. It was a different age in some respects. Knowing that women won the right to vote at national elections and perhaps being aware of the less stringent sex mores of the times, whether or not one attributes them to Freudianism, school boards came to write less restrictive contracts.

The duties imposed on the country schoolteacher were surely heavy enough to debilitate her by the end of the day and would render unnecessary restrictions on her "going out," for instance. Beyond the pressing need to have recitations nearly all of the time just to get the classes in, she had heavy demands laid on her physically.

In her 1898 contract, Sarah Fanning (at Stuhr Museum, previously cited), for the salary of $32.00 per month for nine months agreed to "keep the school house in good repair, to provide the necessary fuel and supplies." A phrase, "and to furnish the janitor work," was lined out and replaced with, "Miss Fanning is to do the janitor work." She was personally to sweep the floors and could, apparently, not hire it done. What was involved exactly in keeping the building in good repair was not clear. Was she to replace broken windows at her own expense? Mr. Robert L. Conger (previously cited) recalled the many duties of his former teachers:

> The teacher aside from being teacher, was counselor, a mediator, nurse, judge, jury, disciplinarian and jack of all trades. He or she was also the duly elected janitor. This included the housekeeping as well as starting and maintaining the fire in the coal stove. On winter mornings the temperature on the inside was about like the outside. The teacher tried to get there early and get the fire going before the pupils arrived. Any teacher, worth his or her salt, was enterprising enough to incorporate some of the janitor work into their discipline program.

That is to say that students might dust the erasers to pay for being mischievous.

Any rural schoolteacher up to the 1940's could agree with Mr. Conger's account and round it out with details of his own. Modern teachers are inclined to feel sorry for the physical labors their early counterparts endured. One has to consider the times here also. Many of the teachers, take Miss Anderson as an instance, had attended country schools themselves and knew what to expect. Further, being farm-reared, they knew what physical work meant. Thus, regarded in the context of their times, the work, relatively speaking, I emphasize, seemed less onerous to them than to us. My interviews show them to be made of pretty stern stuff. Finding mice in the cupboards, leaving through the windows to avoid the rattlesnake that blocked the doorway, pouring kerosene on cobs to

start the fire, and eating cold lunches were not insurmountable obstacles for them, and maybe not even distasteful. All of the former country schoolteachers I interviewed now live in comfortable places, but none seemed really to regret this phase of their lives.

In the quotation above, Mr. Conger called the country schoolteacher a disciplinarian. All teachers are that, of course, whether of yesterday or the present. Discipline in schools is as much as ever a common concern. Somehow the subject arises when we look back to the rural school, for we often picture a young lady or man timorously going out to the first school in which the students, including overgrown farm boys, are aching to "drive the teacher out." Of course, the teachers faced their new situations with some trepidation. Did not the patrons look on "keeping order" as one of the first prerequisites to "keeping a good school"? I will consider the problem of discipline from research into the records and from personal interviews.

Frank Grady recalled some features of student discipline:

> The first teacher in Raymond school was run out by the boys, who used stones as weapons of assault. The second met the same gang, but when he had soundly thrashed one boy, and the youth's father coming to take up the battle shared the same fate, the reign of terror ended abruptly, and a new respect for the school was established.[5]

Mr. Grady commented on another teacher:

> J. W. Kerns who used to pull up the window and spit a gob of tobacco juice clean down to Main Street. . .the discipline on the whole was pretty good. . . .There were no high-falooting laws, and the teacher could whale the very devil out of you if it would aid in your bringin to time.

He recalled another story about a teacher:

> /He_/ was already in the school on New Years Day, and they threw brimstone—sulphur I reckon it's called—down the chimney and smoked him out, getting possession of the premises. . . .Quite a percentage of the big fellows considered the teacher Public Enemy Number One. The worst

> thing of all was when the parents took up the battle of the kids. . . . That happened quite often and they vowed that if the kids couldn't put the teacher out, they would. They usually got the worst of it, however.

Apparently the rough-and-ready discipline recounted in Mr. Grady's salty language worked. The students did not take over the schools he mentioned.

In the instance of the McCarthy School, District 29 in Washington County, the teacher found it difficult controlling the seventy-five students. Many were larger boys there because they could not farm in the winter. He was driven out. Jimmy Van Duesen in taking his place laid a gun across the top of his desk said, "Boys, I'm here for business—to teach." He had no trouble.[6] Charles Wertz of Richland had proven himself capable of handling the boys by reason of his activity in other really manly pursuits. He frequently took leaves of absence from his school to join cattle drives, to hunt horse thieves, to serve as a payroll courier, and to join posses searching for criminals. Meanwhile he continued to attend college.[7] Few large boys, I suspect, would have had the temerity to challenge this man.

The paddling or whipping was a common occurrence in country schools, as elsewhere. A student would be asked to kneel over frontwards to make the trousers, and the skin, more taut and increase the pain. A teacher might draw a small ring on the blackboard, tell the student to put his nose into it, and, if he could not, boost him skyward with blows from a heavy, three-foot ruler applied to his rear section. Mrs. Caroline Pifer relates how her sister, Mari Sandos, administered corporal punishment. No one but members of her family received it, although they may have been scolded. Mrs. Pifer was punished at least once a year, either with hand or book. One time Mari became exasperated with her brother who was not learning fast enough, so she sent her sister Flora to get

a strap, supposedly to beat the subject into him. She struck him repeatedly. When he shielded his rear with his hands to protect it, she strapped them until the buckle on it raised welts.[8]

Matters of discipline with the big boys in his school came out all right for John G. Neihardt in his first job in the country. He approached it with forebodings. The Moderator of the school board had warned him that the boys in the school needed a good thrashing, and he knew that a young woman teacher had been driven out weeping. The "three husky cornfeds" might think they could do the same with him.

But, this short young man not much taller than five feet strove to screw up his courage. Didn't he have a chest expansion of ten inches, and couldn't he tear a pack of playing cards in two with just his hands, and didn't he have the high score of 1705 on the striking machine, all this and a trick wrestling hold, he told himself?

He got a chance to use his strength and wrestling skill. It came in a snow fight (school began for him in December) when the children ganged up on him. Suddenly, Bill Kendrick, "amply shouldered and chested like a buffalo bull calf," scooped up a handful of snow, bent on washing the teacher's face. The time for the wrestling hold had come. He upended the pupil and slammed him down on his back. Kendrick was humbled but reached out, placed his hand on his teacher's shoulder and laughed.[9] After this show of strength, discipline was no problem.

Speaking of his Sand Hills experiences, Robert L. Conger (previously cited) observed that four of five of his teachers were "very efficient" in discipline, in an era, he stated, where the teacher had "full authority." They could have good order because the parents stood behind them. He recalled

a year when the teacher set up a system of student government to handle discipline problems:

> We elected a sheriff and a panel of judges. The judges were usually always the same girls. We had witnesses on both sides of the question. The fate of the culprit was settled by the last word of the judges. The penalties varied greatly. There was staying after school, a whipping by the teacher and one fight to a finish by two of the accused culprits. One of these fellows accused the other of calling him a liar. The accused was hauled into court and sentenced to fight the other till neither could go anymore. As the fight progressed and the pace slowed, the teacher added to the tempo. He used a cottonwood switch to speed things up. Time took its toll and neither could fight any longer. They both sported black eyes and fat lips. There were lesser sentences where the teacher set the penalty. I might also add that there were very few acquittals. I don't remember having held office very often; after all, someone had to be the culprit. I was a recipient of whippings by the teacher and one of the combatants in the fight to a finsih. There was a strange force pulling me to where the action was. The teachers had a way of taking a very dim view of some of my activities. I think they may have been in cahoots with my parents. There was a rule at home that if I got a whipping at school, I also got one at home. I averaged two a day for quite an unbelievable period of time. My tattling brothers and sisters made sure the score was kept even.
>
> I discussed this method of order and discipline with the former teacher recently. We decided that it was a bad thing that never should have happened.

My interviews show that such violence in disciplinary matters was the exception, not the rule. Few are the teachers in any age who like to admit to having had problems in discipline that got out of hand and required strong corrective measures. They might be branded as poor managers. None the less, no former teacher that I interviewed reported he or she had to resort to such corporal punishment as described in the Mari Sandoz account. Most said they avoided severe problems because they and the students respected each other.

It was the country teacher's lot to be underpaid. An old saying seems to rule. It says when hard times come it will be teachers who absorb the cutback in revenues first. With the teachers under our discussion, however, who in truth probably were underpaid, one has to recognize that cash was hard to come by for many districts. For the farmer-supporters of the school, it involved their selling a thin surplus of grains, or meat, or milk they were able to spare

beyond their domestic wants. With the slender funds thus received they must buy store products—and pay their taxes. Often, to them, the salary paid the teacher must have seemed munificent indeed. In rural areas in general, those persons who held salaried positions received for their efforts what the farmer frequently did not—the currency of the realm. A figure of speech in Mark Twain's writings referred to a man who felt as happy as if "he was on salary."

In the present day, when a beginning teacher can draw $10,000.00 for a nine-months' term and expect to make as much as $14,000.00 after several years, the sums paid those working the 1880's, say, or in the 1930's seem like pittances. The Annual Reports of School District #54 to the County Superintendent of Public Instruction for Otoe County, available in Rosalie Trail Fuller's A History of Camp Creek School (previously cited), lists these amounts paid teachers for selected years:

1969	60 days, salary $111.00
1872	60 days for $30.00 per month
1885	119 days at $33.33 per month
1892	57 days for $35.00.

Figures for District 61, Clay County, are not much different. In 1883, J. C. McKee drew $30.00 for one month of teaching. By 1920-21 Bertha Labedz drew $85.00 per month as did Rose Schmidt in 1923-24. In 1934-33, during the Great Depression, the district salary was $30.00 a month.[10] Phoebe Johnson Morgan recalled in Early Days in Polk County, p. 258 (previously cited) that she began teaching in 1900 at $25.00 per month in a country school two miles south of Osceola, where she swept the floor, carried in cobs and coal, and took out the ashes. After four months, the school board raised her salary to $35.00 per month. In Antelope County, about the time the county superintendent was forming school districts, Miss Ella Wyman taught her first school in District #8 for $8.00 a month and boarded herself. Other teachers generally received from twelve to fifteen dollars monthly. Two years later they

went up until the county-wide average was $20.00 per month with three teachers drawing $12.00 and $50.00.[11] In the early 1880's, Benjamin F. Grundy taught a country school on Prairie Dog Creek in Harlan County sixty days for sixty dollars. Like other men teachers of his day, he supplemented his teaching wages by farming and working with his team of horses on the Burlington Railroad in the Holdrege area.

Salaries had to come up from the low sums paid in such instances as those reported above by Leach. They climbed gradually to the time of the 1929 stock market crash, then fell, though rarely dropping to the thirty dollars monthly reported for Clay County in the 1930's. Mrs. Erna England, who began teaching in 1932, drew $60.00 per month and nothing lower than $55.00 for the remaining years of the Depression.[12] One feature often remembered by teachers of those times but not especially recalled in my interviews, but for Mrs. Manion's comment, was the practice of a district's paying off in warrants which the teacher often had to cash in at a discount at a bank, in Mrs. Manion's instance, at 2%. Despite the low salaries, one teacher, Mrs. Dessie Bellew (previously cited), was able to save money on her fifty dollars and attend summer school.

The salaries just listed could hardly have provided for a plush living, to be certain. For the vast numbers of daughters, and it was women who carried the brunt of filling the desks of teachers throughout Nebraska, teaching the district school was often their only alternative as a career.

Mrs. Neva Nicolarsen enjoyed her teaching in the several one-room schools mostly north of Kearney but, in looking back, remembers it was a relief to move into a town school where she would not be so rushed trying to get her

recitations in. Others probably felt this way since most of them did leave the country schools for town positions as soon as they could, as Mr. Younglund stated. Their moves were dictated in many cases by declining enrollments, of course.

Miss Grace Corner of Auburn (previously cited), who began her career right out of high school, wanted from her earliest childhood days to teach. When she won her first position, she was thoroughly happy in it, teaching grades kindergarten through the eighth. Everyone was busy; they loved working together. They became fine citizens. Many went back to the farm life. Miss Corner taught but two years in the country, moving into Auburn for a tenure of forty-five years. She testified that she thoroughly enjoyed her two-year stint and volunteered her belief that today's rural schools do a fine job. Mrs. Ira Mundschenck (previously cited) regarded herself as a professional in her several years in country schools. She tried to listen to the students and to understand them. She took each student as an individual and dealt with him on that basis. Further, she attempted to offer students a wide range of learning. One way to do this, she was convinced, was to stress reading, particularly the independence they could gain in reading through phonics. A history enthusiast, she felt that a knowledge of the past would help them. For disciplinary reasons, she stayed on the schoolground at recess and noons; however, if there were problems, they were locked up in the schoolhouse and not sent home at night to the parents. These she saw as ways of manifesting her professionalism. Robert L. Conger credited his rural school teachers solely with arousing his curiosity about the world to the extent that he has traveled widely over it. When asked whether they would elect again to undergo the same often harsh

(?)

experiences of their rural school teaching, the invariable, rarely hesitating answer was "Yes."

The next two citations with which I will end this chapter recapitulate the various features of a teacher's country school experience. The first, a newspaper article, discloses a teacher's joyous feelings about her work in earlier years. The second, a poem, gives a poet's imagined insights into the feelings of a young schoolteacher:

> Those wonderful one room school days! How I enjoyed them. With love and affection we were all just one happy family. From coaxing a fire in the old heater each morning to sweeping the wide board floor each late afternoon, every hour was a delight to me.
>
> The younger ones learned from the older ones, the larger ones helped the little ones and all worked together to help each other and to help me. I loved my 32 pupils in all eight grades. They were great! I had never attended or visited a rural school, so it was all a new experience. I was only 17 years old and just out of high school.
>
> The lunch buckets around the stove on cold days, the starched dimity curtains, the dark gray woodwork, the green oatmeal wallpaper, the stone water jar, the tin cups lined upon the shelf, the crudely built shelf with the Webster's large dictionary on it were all typical of the one room school of 1922. Mine had a gray cupboard at the back, double seats for the pupils and a large teacher's desk with the recitation bench in the front of the room. Pupils would march up in front to recite their lessons.
>
> What fun it was to practice dialogues, songs, and recitations for the school program and annual box supper. Usually numbers were sold on a five pound box of candy which was raffled off. The money raised would buy new library books. I recall our Negro minstrel number at that first program which made quite a hit with the audience. A second grade boy could jig and greatly added to that dialogue.
>
> We had attendance contests, cyphering and spelling matches and worked for weekly reading awards. The award was a pretty picture card with the words "Reward for Merit" on it. The County Superintendent provided beautiful attendance certificates for the pupils. Some of these pupils, now grown, still have these certificates.
>
> There was no discipline problem as these conscientious pupils worked so hard to get their lessons and developed initiative and responsibilities. My four eighth graders worked diligently to pass the dreaded 8th grade state examinations held each May at Osceola, the county seat of Polk County. Cube root and square root were 8th grade arithmetic requirements and mental arithmetic, drawing, penmanship, English composition were separate tests the 8th graders had to pass in addition to the other regular study tests.
>
> I recall with deep feeling those happy days. My 8th grade pupil is now my brother-in-law as he married my youngest sister. And the pretty little

second grader married one of my brothers, and the sweet little pre-schooler who visited one day now is married to my youngest brother.

My mother, Mrs. William Stevens, my two sisters, Mrs. Grayce Burney and Mrs. Hazel Hill and myself all taught this same school, District 45 in Polk County. My mother taught there in 1892 before she was married.[12]

Edwin Ford Piper is the author of "The Schoolmmstress":

I

In morning breeze, the Indian summer's gold
Of sun on Mildred's cheeks aglow
Beneath dark hair; it glistens on the horse,
A glossy chestnut tossing his thick mane
In spirited canter, held straight on the path
Across the rolling prairie the four miles
To the little, low, schoolhouse by the creek,
Two windows on the side, a home-made door,
Sod roof a trifle weedy, the rough ends
Of split ash rafters showing at the edge.
A shed, and ponies that will carry double—
Half of the children ride.

Within the house
Pine tables in four rows, benches to match,
Incipiently notched: a joyous map,
A painted blackboard; a high walnut desk
Brightened with flowers above the slender stem
Of a glass vase. Mid-room the mighty stove,
A swallower of enormous chunks of wood
So that the fire may roar within the drum,
And all the stove's girth turn a glowing red
In challenge to the fury of winter wind.

This is but brisk October. The bell calls,
And the tanned children in coarse, home-made
clothes
Come clattering to stow head-gear on the hooks
Above the baskets, tiptoe to the seats,
Sing, hear the Bible, fall to study fast.
Jimmie's work shoes must dangle in mid-air
As he prints with pride old news about the cat;
Here dark curls with red ribbons shake and
bob
As Susie struggles with her fraction sums;
Here Philip's mouth is grim as he tears apart
Some tough old sentence, settling word and
word
On the painful diagram. Here Johnnie sits
Enraptured with the animals and trees,

Cities and ships and wondrous waterfalls
Of the big geography, while up in front
A class drones heavily through Paul Revere.

The walls are chinked with plaster; overhead
Run tie-beam, purlin, ridge-pole, cleanly barked,
Supporting rafters overlaid by willows
Cut in green leaf, and now upholding sod.
Sometimes a mouse runs rustling; harmless
snakes
Come sliding to the floor, or up the logs
A dusky lizard darts.

'Tis here she moves,
The genius of the place, viewed as all wise
In booklore, honest, patient, loving, kind,
Courageous: all these talents for the sum
Of twenty-five a month and board herself.

II.

Shall not life pay the man who catches dogs?
In his soul's garden, mildew. Does a tree
Not utter unconscious joy in the exquisite
Color and form and fragrance of its fruit?
There's natural joy in healthy human service,
Natural, not sacrificial. Monthly salary
Is token laborers are somehow worthy;
Useful, too, for books, beefsteak, and vacations.
For Mildred much of worth lay in the store
Her memory could treasure: the old room,
The children clustering, happiness in eye
And grace in movement; Willie's gentle lisp
Struggling with stubborn words; the lame boy's
look
Of speechless worship with a yellow rose;
The five-year-olds clinging about her skirts;
The half-grown girls with arms about her waist
Asking her to their homes; great awkward
boys,
Heady as bulls, the slaves of her every word,
Toiling prodigiously in Ray's Third Part
Over cube root, and roaring at recess
In Prisoner's Base, or old-time games of ball.

If Mildred looked out when the sweeping rain
Blurred the gray prairie, limiting her sight
To scanty fields, did fancy mark far miles
With rose-lanes of romance, nor show the drudgers
In sweat and dust, or did she clearly sense
Workaday folk with private griefs at heart
And a tune on the lips in the field?

If she had dreams
They colored and perfumed shrines not unveiled
To vulgar gaze. The girl had been through college,
Traveled to California and New York;
For some seven months she rode a chestnut horse,
And was the teacher of this country school
At twenty-five a month and board herself.[13]

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Chapter VI.

The Country School Today

There is a greater range in the kinds of country schools today than in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To illustrate, a rural school in Buffalo County north of Elm Creek has outdoor privies. Another such school sits on a hill in southwestern Custer County. It has no water on the grounds so the teacher must bring it from her home. Nor does it have indoor restrooms. In the Triangle School northeast of Arthur and in the Snyder School west of Tryon, the school boards have managed to squeeze restrooms into the small frame buildings, both supplied with wells on the grounds. Five miles southwest of Kearney, District 114, Alfalfa Center, named from the alfalfa fields and mill thereby, a two-room building of the style generally built in the 1920's, is completely modern. It is now augmented by a "double-wide" moved in from the Glenwood District. In the new Glenwood School five miles north of Kearney, students and teachers enjoy the finest of up-to-date facilities in a new brick building which houses six full time teachers. These are but examples of the varieties of buildings that now constitute the country schools of Nebraska.

Virtually all of these schools are well equipped. I know of none that lacks electricity and telephones. All I have investigated have some form of gas for heating, either natural or propane. The present-day teacher does not have to wait on a new fire to warm up the building. In some, the teacher still does the custodial work, although this practice is becoming less common. Consider Alfalfa Center. Two full time teachers preside over the education of forty children, but for music and kindergarten which are taught by a half-time person. An aid helps the teacher of grades one through three for a half day, then moves

to grades four and six. For one semester, a student majoring in physical education at Kearney State College comes out to help in that area. One full time and one part time cook prepare hot lunches for the students and teachers. The district also employs a custodian to take care of the carpeted floors and the modern toilet facilities. The school has the learning machines common to most schools. While one can find schools where teachers do not enjoy the time they should have because short-handed, it is obvious, taking the school above as an example from many, that the country schoolteacher of today has improved her lot in those respects.

In one sense, the country school with a single, unaided teacher no longer exists. Though only one may be under contract, she has others helping her, as provided for by Educational Service Units and, in one area, a cooperative service agency. In 1965, the Legislature of the State of Nebraska passed LB #301 as follows:

> In order to provide supplementary educational services to local school districts, there are hereby established nineteen educational service units. The official name of such units shall be Educational Service Unit No. ___of the State of Nebraska.[1]

A letter from Rodney D. Smith, Administrator of ESU #11 at Holdrege, encapsulates the services his and other units can supply a teacher:

> Our initial services included a 16mm film library, school nurses, speech therapists and art teachers. Through the years the program of services has expanded to include a wide range of programs for handicapped students and programs for the gifted. We are also extensively involved in providing teacher in-service programs. Additional services include: audio visual equipment repair, microcomputers for loan to schools, production and copying of instructional materials and cooperative purchasing of school supplies and equipment.

Mr. Smith lays out some of the provisions for assistance:

> Decisions regarding the kinds of services that we provide to the schools are made by the school districts themselves. Naturally the schools want these service units to provide services that they find difficult or impossible to maintain within a single school district. For this reason, it is my judgment that ESU #11 has had a significant positive effect on the educational programs that the individual schools provide for their students.[2]

A teacher who wants a hearing and vision test for her students, who wants materials for a bright child, has a film projector that needs repair, wants a picture laminated or a transparency made, or who wishes to order out a film from the ESU catalog can get this help, not so readily available before 1965.

Of special note are such programs as those sponsored by ESU agencies, often, in the instance of the poet-in-the-school, handled jointly with the Nebraska Arts Council. Generally, a recognized poet skilled in working with young people will spend a week's residency in a school teaching various grade levels how to write poetry. The following poem by Dr. Donovan Welch, Poet-in-residence at Kearney State College, is a touching account of one session at a rural school:

Poet in Residence at a Country School

The school greets me like a series
of sentence fragments sent out to recess.
Before I hit the front door
I'm into a game of baseball soccer.
My first kick's a foul; my second sails
over the heads of the outfielders;
rounding third base, I suck in my stomach
and dodge the throw of a small blue-eyed boy.
I enter the school, sucking apples of wind.
In the fifth-grade section of the room
I stand in the center of an old rug and ask,
Where would you go where no one could find you,
a secret place where you'd be invisible
to everyone except yourselves;
what would you do there: what would you say?
I ask them to imagine they're there,
and writing a poem. As I walk around the room,
I look at the wrists of the kids,
green and alive, careful with silence.
They are writing themselves into fallen elms,
corners of barns, washouts, and alkali flats.
I watch until a tiny boy approaches,
who says he can't think of a place,
who wonders today, at least, if
he just couldn't sit on my lap.
Tomorrow, he says, he'll write.

> And so the two of us sit under a clock,
> beside a gaudy picture of a butterfly,
> and a sweet poem of Christina Rosetti's.
> And in all that silence, neither of us
> can imagine where he'd rather be.[3]

An agency, similar to the ESU's, serves Custer and Blaine Counties, its director, Martin L. Heflebower reports. It is the Sand Hills Educational Services Group, headquartered in Broken Bow. An excerpt from his letter explains the circumstances of its being established:

> . . . when all of the counties in the State of Nebraska had the opportunity to vote either into or out of the Educational Service Units, Custer and Blaine Counties were two of the counties that voted to stay out. When LB 403 was passed, there was no ESU to call on for service, so the Coop was formed.
>
> There are two school districts in Custer County that do not belong to the Coop, but contract for services from Educational Service Unit #10 in Kearney. This points out that participation in the Coop is a voluntary thing.

Mr. Heflebower says that his Coop has no taxing powers, as do the ESU's and is paid by districts for services provided only, therefore does not present a tax burden on the counties. He further mentions that his Coop does not provide audio-visual materials and equipment. A list of services provided includes, I judge, about every other special assistance—teacher aids, classes for mentally retarded, speech therapy, and the like—that the ESU Bulletin describes.[4] One hears frequently a story of the earlier days in which a dim-witted boy of thirteen attends classes with the third graders where he poses a problem who had neither the time nor the ability to deal with the situation. So, the boy drifted, probably to his and her frustration. The modern teacher has a source of help.

Getting an adequate supply of books concerned most country schoolteachers. Early attempts to alleviate this problem were made by the Nebraska Public Library Commission established in 1901, after six years of work by interested persons. One aim was to improve school libraries. Accordingly, it published "A List of

Books for School Libraries," distributed through the offices of county superintendents to all teachers in the state. In 1902, the Commission had thirty collections of forty volumes each traveling about the state. It reported "phenomenal" circulation. Each volume was loaned out 6.5 times. In 1905, the Commission placed sample twenty-five dollar collections of books in each of the junior normal schools, and also set up Library Days. At the time, the Secretary of the Commission noted that nothing on the state statute books either required or encouraged school districts to possess books aside from texts.[5]

In today's rural school, like those described in McPherson County by Mrs. Helen Waits, a bookmobile will drive up to the door on a regular schedule of two weeks. Children will walk through it, checking out what suits them, and turning in books they had read. In two weeks or so, the bookmobile will return with a new crop of books for the children's use.

Most students of yesterday's rural schools were somewhat awed by a visit from the county superintendent. He would chat with the teacher and possibly walk through the aisles looking over a nervous youngster's shoulder at his writing, reminiscent of the scene William Butler Yeats painted in his poem, "Among School Children." This man, the only one the children might see in a year wearing a business suit, was also a great help to the teacher. As Mr. Gordon Hansen, County Superintendent of Adams County, noted, the people in the county office were the only administrators country schoolteachers had, and, as such, they mediated between the State Department of Education and the schools.[6]

An account by C. W. Crum, a county superintendent around 1900, reveals something both of the nature of his duties and the awe he inspired:

> When I started out to call on the rural schools, I went as far away as I could and called on 62 in the S. W. corner of the county /Madison_/. Miss Tena Thompson was teacher and Miss Anna Torgerson was visiting her that day. They were scared stiff and I was scared worse. They were the finest type of Norwegian, and the finest type of teachers--the kind we want to keep in the work, but unfortunately for the schools, the kind that get married. . . .A few days later I called at No. 10 west of Battle Creek, Miss Pearl Reese, teacher. . .one of the best teachers I have known. Quiet and sweet and modest and forceful.[7]

Miss Berniece Anderson of Stromsburg was quite apprehensive of her superintendent's first visit, but found that she was quite helpful, with ideas on art and the school program. Also, she would show the fledgling teacher how to complete the school records. This visiting official was always "nice" and asked always how she could assist.

Speaking from a background of eight years as student in a rural school and eight more as teacher in one plus ten or more years as a city junior high school principal, Ray Craig, now Superintendent of Schools for Lincoln County for the past ten years, supervises fourteen Class I districts which employ forty teachers. He is responsible for keeping the records for them (as well as for all other schools in the county) and certain supplies. He must by law visit each school once a year, although it is often necessary, he states, to visit some more than once. He approves annual budgets submitted by the various school boards. He makes certain all teachers have valid teaching certificates. Also, he is responsible for the annual school census. As a corollary matter, his office verifies birth certificates. At the time of recording his recollections on tape for "The Country School Project," he was planning for a county government day.[8]

Four years ago, Mr. Glen Estes ended a career of thirty-seven years as superintendent of Rock County Schools. He supervised sixty-two districts in the 1930's when he took office and helped to consolidate them down to the present eight. Helping boards of education to prepare sixty budgets was, he commented, a heavy job and took his entire summer. In this position, he noted

in passing, he made enough to live on in only one year, at all others being obliged to work as an accountant and as city clerk. Similarly obligated to visit each school once a year, he attempted to cover them all before the snows came, the open nature of the land considered where the southern part was Sand Hills and some schools quite difficult to find. Some in the southeastern and southwestern parts of Rock County might be as much as forty to forty-five miles away from Bassett or any other town in the county.

There could be poor teachers, Mrs. Estes suggested, and with some he just about "had to live in the district." One could not teach grammar, so every year Mr. Estes would do it for her. On one occasion he had "to settle the students down," and when they found out they could not rule things, school resumed in an orderly manner. As the administrator for the rural schools, he, as did so many others, held teachers' institutes. One custom, also in general practice, was to bring in speakers, and Mr. Estes recalls with satisfaction having invited Nebraskans Val Peterson and Freeman Decker to his institutes.[9]

At the time of my interviewing Mrs. Jane Peterson, successor to Mr. Estes as Superintendent of Rock County Schools, she was conducting a teachers' institute. It was gratifying to see that she and the teachers were involved in discussions of ways to teach subject matter, in one instance the inductive method. Typical of the practices of other superintendents, Mrs. Peterson supplies a variety of services to the teachers. She encourages them to continue their college education by getting extension courses held in Bassett from Nebraska colleges. One was a course in learning difficulties sponsored by Wayne State College. Teachers respond with enthusiasm to such courses, Mrs. Peterson said. Their schools were the first in the nation, she suggests, to have the North Start art program, funded by the Federal Government for the disadvantaged in art. A person has been in the area for six years working together with the local ESU, to acquaint the students with art. The program brought a large mobile conveyance by which

it took art to the country schools. It hired artists in watercolor, pottery, silk screening, and textiles to demonstrate them to the students. The funding ended in 1980 but art instruction through the ESU will continue.

Once a year teachers organize and conduct a music festival. It is held in April. In the morning the students of all schools combine to practice and in the afternoon present a program to parents and friends. A brother of two sisters who teach in the county has been returning to help with the festival. He, a member of the Sybrant family of Rock County, is a graduate in music of the University of Nebraska-Omaha. At the time of the festival, the teachers select songs for the next year's event. This past spring their theme was cowboys. All in all, students will learn twenty new songs per year.[10]

While there are these and many more servants that wait on today's country schoolteachers, for example the Nebraska Educational Television facility, one has to conclude that they have a great more help than their counterparts of 1900, for instance. One further concludes that the agencies for assistance noted above have done much to make the country school about as well equipped as its city cousin, though different in terms of numbers served.

No longer can a girl of sixteen with aspirations to teach take the state teachers' examinations at the county seat and begin her career. Nor can the seventeen year old high school student take the teachers' training course plus examinations and secure a contract. He or she can not even go to college for one year or for two only and be certified. But for the "life" certificate earlier alluded to by Dr. Campbell, teachers to be recommended to the State Department for certification must have a bachelor's degree. Not to get into the thorny issue as to whether the present requirements produce better teachers than those with the normal training preparation, it is obvious that the formal preparation is more extended now than ever.

It is probably valid to say that today's country schoolteachers are more cosmopolitan than, say, the farm girl who went at an early age to teach in either her home or a neighboring district school. Mrs. Peterson (previously cited) remarked that in her county, the teachers, while relatively young, have members from Iowa, Kansas, and Michigan. Many have traveled. One teacher has been a member of a choral group that sang at the White House and in South America. For many teachers, travel outside Nebraska is a common matter. The new cars parked by the district school can attest to their capability.

In commenting on the programs of a few schools, I will be unfair, of course, to those which may have equally good programs, but, time being of the essence in any research and writing project, I will have to choose several that seem distinctive, recognizing that my sample is partial.

Should a person wish to visit Miss Audrey Schoenbeck's school in Rock County, he would be well advised to follow her directions: "Go south from Bassett about thirty miles, turn left just before you get to Rose, you'll have fourteen miles of trail road before you reach a church. Turn right. Go straight to a dead end, then turn left about eight miles to the Jordan Ranch House. Turn right, follow the road about five miles over automobile gates (don't turn left). At the Y go up over a hill, and after two more valleys on the right is a trailer and the school house." All this distance of forty-five miles takes one through relatively unpopulated areas, Rose, with a schoolhouse and a post office, being the only settlement.

Here, Miss Schoenbeck, formerly a staff member of a Fort Lauderdale school and a girls' college in Japan, teaches four students in three grades. Asked about her thoughts on the back-to-the-basics urge, she noted that she saw instructional modes swing to the basics in Florida around 1973, but in her Rock County school, they had never left. At District 75, Pleasant Hill, she was trying

to add diversity, not with the textbooks she used, for they were fairly b asic, but with other means. In the teaching of reading, Miss Schoenbeck, with a master's degree in reading nearly completed, used a variety of methods: phonics, the whole language approach, word attack skills, structural analysis, word recognition, and comprehension skills.

As to written composition, "we write all of the time, something every day." Her students compose poems just as anyone else would prose. She taught them how to write free verse. How? First she put some rhymed lines, abab, on the board, "and we talked about them." Next, she placed poetry before them that, while it had the abab rhyme scheme, showed lines of different lengths. Later, came some e e cummings poems. She gave them a sheet of poetry with different poetic forms and asked if they could write after these models. The response was, "Well, I guess," and she reports, "If they could guess they could, they would." Through these means, principally analysis and imitation, she got them to writing both traditional and free verse, also Haiku. A fourth grade student now writes poetry outside of assignments.

Her students now see history as alive. Before, she suggests, they regarded it as something that happened in the past, and nothing more. Now it is events that have been built upon. History is dynamic to them. While this growth took two years, they finally began to comment on history, by asking, "Did you see what the United States did"? Then conversation would drift to other, similar doings in the past on which these were based. She developed their historical consciousnesses through a regular history text which had some conversation and through historical novels. She used her experiences in Florida and Japan on which to draw, looking at the United States from a vantage point outside it.

What qualities should she hope for in her graduated eighth graders? She would trust them to know how to listen to others. She would wish they had initiative, yet not overly so. She would want them to fit into their own

culture, for the good of their own self-concept. For herself, she expects to be a guide, to teach students to make choices on their own and to work constructively, to develop good study habits and thus to acquire a rich background. She hopes that education will open doors and windows for their minds.[11]

Sisters Christy Sybrant Keller and Judith Sybrant Duvalle, while not twins, are twin-like in their approaches to teaching. They grew up on a ranch in Rock County and found their way into country schoolteaching which they like, principally because the position offers them independence. Respecting the basics, her father, Judith remarked, advised her that whoever mastered them had what he needed to succeed, and, she suggested, that had been the case with him. As to written composition, she was certain that a knowledge of the structure of the language will lead a student into sentences that "go together well." The more her students write the more they like to. It is "hard to get them to stop." In creative writing, they might get their writing ideas from films. The whole Sybrant family loves to write, Judith commented, and try to transfer the love of it to their pupils. The sisters believe that if students see their teacher writing and liking it, they will enjoy trying it also.

The writing of poetry is a regular part of their curriculums. The students like Haiku and free verse especially well. Ideas for them come from several sources, maybe their disappointment with their teachers, or problems at home. A boy student who had not cared at all for writing was able to write "the most beautiful Haiku." He did so well because Haiku had a form; it gave him a "boundary" for his thoughts. Students need a guide, Judith declared. To say only "Write a poem" is to pose a difficult and imposing task, but setting

forth a form helps one to start. An important thing, she suggested, was to get students to put the first line down and let successive lines grow from it.[12] These awarenesses in the teaching of writing are, I suggest, quite mature ones and come from people who have thought about the creative processes and have put them to practice.

Christy began college as a music major, so it is a special part of her life, she noted. The children in her school like country-western music so much that she tries to give them other kinds as well. For instance, she might teach her children to conduct to classical music on a record player. She has put on musicals, not musical festivals, she points out, but musicals. Recently, three rural schools combined their talents to put on "A Look at Broadway, Country Style." Organized by the teachers, it was a success and showed the patrons that "hick country kids can really do something."

The students learn something of the language of music, time signatures and the bass and treble clefs, for instance, though the sisters make no special effort to teach students to read notes. The two specialize in dance more than in technical music. It is, one said, a real challenge to teach dance in a four by four school house. Not only do they choreograph dances but they also teach the students to. They try to create dance steps that fit the nature of the music. If the music sounds like galloping horses, they fit the steps to it.

Do they integrate other disciplines? Yes, they replied, science and mathematics, music and art. They might put a Tschaikowsky record on and let the feelings of the music be recorded with the paint brushes on paper. The students draw what they hear. If the music is loud, the colors may show up as bright red. If light and soft, thin, tiny lines may appear. The words of one song they use, "Bad, bad Leroy Brown," requires close listening, they suggest, so that

the painted feeling-states can be properly represented. These ways of handling their subjects seem distinctive.

District 114 near Kearney has a music program similar to that discussed above. For one public performance, teacher Mrs. Elsie P. Grundy presented a pageant of American history through song and dance, writing the continuity herself, teaching the songs and dances, and presenting it to an audience of parents, grandparents, and friends. The text of the introduction is as follows:

"This is America's story in music—days of poverty and prosperity, hours of smiles and tears, all recorded in song through the years. The Indians who inhabited our land before the white men came, contributed their part to our music through their songs and dances. In these chants and dances, there were rhythms of the drums and often melodies played on flutes."

In due course came a minuet by Mozart danced by four youngsters accoutered in powdered wigs reminiscent of the days of George Washington. The Spanish influence in Florida and in the Southwest was commemorated by "The Mexican Hat Dance." A Negro folk song, "This Train" and "The Cowboy" followed. Numbers drawing the most enthusiastic responses spoke of the modern period—the Charleston danced to "Five Foot Two," a jazz tune, "That's A Plenty," one celebrating the entry of Hawaii as a state, "Hu Ki La," then a disco tune and dance complete with flickering, purplish lights. Two patriotic songs, "America the Beautiful" and "You're a Grand Old Flag" rounded out this historical musical.

Information about Miss Tina Christensen's Peaceful Plains School, District 4 in Thomas County, comes to me principally by letter, the "Historic Sites" form, and the school's newspaper. Peaceful Plains, like the first two schools discussed in this chapter, lies in the most sparsely settled section of Nebraska, twenty-five miles south and fifteen west of Thedford. The school was built in 1968, was in use for three years, then vacant for ten, but has been in session since the fall of

1979. The teacher lives on the grounds.

Somewhat indicative of the nature of the school is the fact that it is a member of the Nebraska Historical Society. It is the Peaceful Plains Paper, however, that speaks eloquently of the school.

On Friday morning, September 5, Miss Tina's school left for Thedford at 8:30 for health checks about 10:00 a.m. Afterwards they went to the library and "got lots of books and some Sesame Street records." This was followed by lunch at the park where the students got "lots of big leaves and beans from the catalpa trees in the park." They saw a lizard "that was really fast." After lunch, they visited an "antique museum." They saw many things including "an old bed that had a note from a woman in North Platte who said she was born in that bed," a quilt, and " a pair of real longhorn horns." That same night was "Night school for the stars." Teacher and students brought their suppers and ate up in the trees, then went inside to study their booklet on the stars. After the sun went down, they climbed a hill and saw some satellites, a shooting star, and some jet planes, the paper reported. They located such constellations as "The Great Square" and "The Northern Cross," also stars like Antares, the red star, and Vega, the blue star. However the day wasn't entirely educational:

> Tammy's little sister fell in the cactus and got stickers all over her legs and hands and wrists. It took a long time to get them all out. On the way back we saw some shiny things. That was eyes from three deer. They were all does.

Friday, September 12, was "Jelly Day." It consisted of the students picking prickly pear apples after dinner. (It is "dinner" at noon and "supper" in the evening for these youthful writers.) After scraping "the little whiskers off," they cooked them, and found "they had a funny smell that smelled like vegetables and fruit together." While some wild plums were cooking, they took turns reading poems. Four boys took the peelings out to dump: "They ate some of the peelings all the way down and all the way back." The next day,

Miss Tina took each of them two jars of wild plum and two of prickly pear jelly: "The prickly pear jelly is good on pancakes. But it's kind of slimy and stringy." Again, the contributor's account of the day had a coda: "Shane and Stacy brought back a ewe's head to add to our collection on our fence."

For movement, earthiness, and compression a la Hemingway, the following story, "Food for the Indian Village," is notable:

> We were riding the three-wheeler getting the milk cow in and we ran over the snake's tail. Shane was driving. Scott thought the snake's tail was a rope. He turned Shane around and ran over it again. It wasn't dead, but we went up to get the milk cow, up on the hill where we look for her. Then we must have run over the rabbit's hole because a rabbit jumped out from under the tire. We chased him on the three wheeler. Shane jumped off. Mittens tackled the rabbit and crippled him. I stomped on his stomach. Then I went back and got Shane, and Shane caught him. We put him in the gunny sack from the tool box. We got the milk dow. Then we followed the snake's trail. We got a brick from by the cow's trail and threw it on the snake. Then we went back and got a shovel and a steel pipe. He was hard to kill. We chopped his head off with the shovel. We brought the rabbit and the snake to school next day. We got our picture taken.

Should one have been wondering what the title of the previous story had to do with its action, the next story, "A Burial, A Bat, and Blue Pills," published the following Friday informs him:

> Before school this morning we buried the big snake and the rabbit because they stunk too much. We put them south of the trees by the Indian village. When you shuffled your feet around where the rabbit was buried, his feet came out of the ground. His ears came out, too.

The last page of Volume II has verses from, "Gonna Take a Ride on My Three Wheeler":

> Gonna take a ride on my three wheeler,
> Gonna take a ride on my three wheeler,
> Zoom zoom rattle bump fly along,
> Gonna take a ride on my three wheeler.
>
> Coat and lunch pail on the back,
> Tie 'em up in an old cake sack.
> Climb climb rattle get on behind
> Climb climb rattle on down to school.

Editor Craig Connel, fourth grade, signs off with

> This was a long paper,
> August and September
> Had a lot of stuff.[13]

In this chapter, I have attempted to describe the rural school today as to its capacity for educating its youthful clientele. It is clear that in respect to physical conditions—warmth, sanitation, hot lunches, and the like—it is well or at least adequately endowed. So many agencies stand ready to help—county superintendents' offices, ESU's, educational television, and others. Teachers have more formal education. The few school activities just recounted, a partial list to be sure, speak well of the accomplishments of rural schools. It remains to speculate on its future.

The question most often bruited about on the country school is not whether it will continue to improve. Rather, it is whether, having declined in numbers so markedly, it will continue that decline and fall below the 400 schools now in existence, or be abolished altogether.

This is a perennial question. One reason is that rural populations in some sectors are declining. Consider Arthur County which has lost population in the last decade, where in certain areas Superintendent Cross observed one could not get enough people together to warrant having a literary. This is but an instance of many. Obviously, maintaining a school with a handful of students is expensive. In spite of that, many districts would prefer to keep the school going than to have their properties added to a city's where the tax levy might be higher.

This problem—that tax support for schools is not universally equal—has disturbed groups of taxpayers who argue that many areas do not pay their full share of the tax load. Accordingly, they seek to pass legislation which will bring those districts, generally Class I, into larger taxing units. For example, ringing the City of Kearney are several quite modern Class I school

districts, at least three with new school buildings. Their eighth-grade graduates can go to any high school in the state because a county-wide levy pays their tuition which, in Buffalo County I am informed, runs between two and three thousand per year per student. A Class I District which ends instruction at the sixth grade has to pay tuition from its own funds for the seventh and eighth grade years. Whether such contiguous districts around Kearney will be required to become part of a K-12 taxing entity is the subject of a bill now before the state legislature. A recent news story quotes Governor Charles Thone as saying he will veto it in its present form because it would interfere with a district's right to local determination.

A few schools whose boundaries run right up to a city's find that the housing subdivisions' encroaching on the country school's taxable lands are creating problems for them in as much as the added valuation of the new residences will not pay for the increased numbers of students added. One board member of such a rural district reported to me that a new house sitting where only a field existed before might add $500.00 to district revenues but, if two more children came in whose per student expense might be $1500.00 each, the district would fall behind. In time, the movement to the country will create serious financial problems for his district as it has for others already. Ray Craig (previously cited), Lincoln County Superintendent, remarks that this situation prevails around the City of North Platte where some schools have a full complement of teachers and a principal but are feeling the pinch of increased enrollment. Such a school district might find it profitable to let its land be joined to neighboring units.

Observing that much consolidation of schools has occurred recently, Gordon Hansen (previously cited), Superintendent of Schools for Adams County also a longtime administrator, states that many other cities have this situation which might hinder their expanding. In Adams County, Hastings is surrounded by rich Class I districts that are also a part of a Class VI (high school) district. Ten of them are consolidated into Adams Central District (Class VI) which gives it a quite high evaluation of $78,000,000.00 for 450 students, Mr. Hansen noted. Apparently, then, these Class I districts (rural schools), having thus far sufficient enrollment and ample tax bases, will not be affected by the legislation mentioned above.

The City of Hastings can only with great difficulty expand its taxing area for school purposes. An Associated Press release published in the Omaha World-Herald, February 24, 1981 (when this chapter is being written), notes that a bill offered by Maurice Kremer, LB 13, was heard by the Education Committee February 23. The release reported witnesses to this effect:

> the Kremer bill likely would result in residents of the suburban and rural Class 1 and 6 districts voting to stay out of the three city districts in Grand Island, Hastings, and Columbus, which are also Class 3 districts.

Up to this point, under certain conditions, the City of Hastings might bring in outlying districts without their voted consent. Kremer's bill would prevent it. Dwayne S. Strasheim, Hastings school board member, spoke against Kremer's bill on the grounds that it would, in the terms of the news release, "strangle growth of the city school systems." LB 308 introduced on the same day as Kremer's bill would deal with a similar situation in areas surrounding Bellevue and Papillion in Sarpy County. It would remove a statutory provision, as the news release states matters, "requiring a vote on expanding school district boundaries to include persons in territory proposed for annexation to Bellevue."

The situation is ultra complex, especially in regard to districts that lie in areas of expanding or shifting populations. Most people interviewed had pretty clear opinions on continuing school where only two or three pupils remained. They thought it inadvisable. In some isolated districts, however, long distances and bad roads might make it desirable to retain a school for those small numbers even. Those persons most devoted to the rural school concept seemed fatalistically to accept the fact that the one-room school would eventually pass out of existence.

I hope that if such a contingency does come to pass that this endeavor, "The Country School Legacy," will let it live in history, at least.

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Chapter VII.

Reflections and New Directions

Throughout this report I have refrained from compaing the country to the city school. To do so, would have more than doubled the research task, and there has been insufficient time as it is. Some comment on the value of the rural schools themselves might profitably be made here, however. It will amount to a kind of justification for their existence. Such values as they possess, or have possessed, can well be read into the present scene as a way of validating the worth of history.

Virtually all present and past country schoolteachers argued for the place of the "basics" in elementary schooling. Now, to some people, the "basics" are what they studied yesterday that was difficult. Most teachers I interviewed saw them as subject matter basic to further learning. For instance, they taught phonics for they were the sound system of the language without a knowledge of which spelling itself was hard to learn. Further, to fuse properly spelled words into sentences, one needed grammar, they thought, They were convinced that knowing the sounds of individual syllables would lead youthful readers better to decode the printed page. It gave them independence. Also, knowing the sounds worked for better pronunciation. So, phonics, the sound system of the language, the smallest units, had to be mastered first. Why skip that needed first step in reading or spelling, they seemed to ask. In the same way, they had students practice the Palmer exercises in penmanship—the ovals continuous, the ovals linked, the push and pull exercises. Why so? Because they contained practically every stroke one would need in cursive writing. They were basic to actual penmanship. While not many country schoolteachers taught singing by note, a few did. In the same way, "do-re-mi" were the funda-

mental parts of song. Then the rural schoolteacher taught the facts of mathematics--addition and subtraction facts and multiplication tables. One could not figure the number of posts in a quarter-mile fence without them. These facts were the first necessary step in problem-solving. Thus, behind the basic reading, writing, and arithmetic courses lay the even more basic set of skills and information. If it is well to emphasize the fundamental skills as prerequisite to the fundamental subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and most people suggest the country schoolteachers taught them well, then their practices offer much for contemporary scrutiny.

A rural schoolteacher calls school into session to begin classes that may take in several grades and several subjects. The third grade student listens in on the upper grade physiology lesson where he learns the physical bases underlying the health habits he has been adjured to practice. The fourth grader who is reading fairy stories in his reader finds a story about a World War I air battle grasping his interest. Perhaps the apt fifth grader has picked up simple square root from the eighth grade classes. These students sample the whole spectrum of studies before they reach them in their own grades. In the same way, upperclassmen review. Senator Carl T. Curtis thought this kind of experience beneficial. Does education have to follow the step-by-step progression religiously? Can not something good be said for reviews and previews?

If a country schoolteacher is a poor one, and if she does not move on after the two years thought about right for tenure in one school, then she could be a youngster's sole educational influence for four or five years, and that could be undesirable, as Dr. Anne Campbell suggested. Contrarily, if she is good, then a long tenure could bless the student. Another feature of the rural

school is that students learn of boys and girls in a larger variety of ages since they sit in the same classroom with them and share the recess games. They are likely to know them better. Something beneficial can accrue from this. Let us assume that we early learn types of people. These types—vicious, pleasant, curious, patient, mild, quick-tempered—can serve as the physical equivalents of such qualities as we see manifested in other ways. They then become symbols. Formed well in our impressionable years, they become the categories by which we sort out personality types we meet further along in life. They are the vehicles of our thoughts in future times.

A Wordsworthian romantic would want his children reared close to nature. The farther they get away from it, the farther they are from God. "The child is the father of man," said Wordsworth. Truly, does taking a child, who is natural, away from his natural setting do damage to his psyche? If that is the case, the child in the rural school probably with undeveloped nature close at hand is in his best place. Note in the Peaceful Plains Paper how the stories smack of a firsthand rubbing of noses with nature, both in the violence shown and the more tender portions, as well as in the simple, direct language. It makes Emerson sound like a prophet when he argued that the man of nature, he of the fields and the forest, would speak a more piquant language than any other. Is there an instruction here for those who would ask children to get their exercise in physical education classes in gymnasiums or live in lighted areas where they can not see the stars?

Several people suggested that many country school patrons sincerely do not want their children to attend town schools where, they were convinced,

discipline proved a problem, also where they might get into bad habits as per dope, especially. Be that as it may, some thought it quite impractical and undesirable to transport children miles and miles, through long morning and evening hours to a larger school. The country school, as they saw it, had the advantage of being a place less tempting to error and also much closer to home. If the latter factor seems invalid, one reflects that many city people do not favor forced busing which takes their children to schools in other neighborhoods than their own.

With but one required visit yearly from a county superintendent, the country schools work with a minimum of supervision. Whatever the disadvantages may be, ~~one is that~~ she does not have a layer or two of administrative officials over her. She likes the independence of being her own boss, largely. Having no principal, she has to be resourceful. She faces problems with parents on her own, similarly those involving discipline. She is the hour-by-hour counselor for her students. Having in Nebraska no prescribed course of study, she has to plan her own, for the greater part. Thus, she develops in herself the quality of self-reliance. Most country schoolteachers travel several miles to their schools. They have to open the building and set the physical plant to going themselves. Most of them have no coffee break and, in fact, little isolation from their students for at least six hours. I have found them to be tough, resourceful, uncomplaining people. They are good models for a profession.

Research comes about because one has a problem that requires a solution. Maybe this burr under one's mental saddle blanket is just that one does not know and needs to. Whatever it might be, one expects that research will turn

up other knotty questions that demand answering. Here, I will suggest a few.

A year ago, I asked the State Department of Education for figures comparing the academic performances in high school of country school graduates with those from larger, city schools. It had none. Three weeks past, an assistant to a state senator asked for the same information from me. I could give her none. Within the past two weeks, I have fielded the quary from two citizens whose children go to Class I, rural schools. Again, I could supply none. LB 319, discussed in an earlier chapter, has stirred up some furor.

Such a study should be made. If country schools are to face conditions that will militate against their continued existence, then someone should know if really effective educational institutions are going under. Then, at least some solid reasons would guide the voters, one way or the other.

In a few areas, churches and schools are located close to each other. Whether they are closely connected, that is if school is a part of the church community, or not, the influence of one on the other as a purely historical study might well be undertaken before one or the other or both cease operations.

In the northern sections of Nebraska, Indians from the reservations in South Dakota or from the Santee Sioux, Winnebago, and Omaha reservations in Nebraska have attended the white man's, non-agency schools. While I have commented on one or two of them, there must have been many more. One needs the kind of study for the Indian that parallels those of Winther and Nielsen for the Danish immigrants.

In another way, our research is but a beginning. It might well be extended in another sense. Our instructions stipulated that we should try to cover most geographical areas of Nebraska. Thus, it was impossible to cover any area in depth. In Holt County, for example, there are around forty-five one or two-teacher schools. This is a phenomenon that needs intensive investigation. There are others.

In closing, it remains to make a comment on the country school to this effect. It is a beleagured institution and will not, for long, withstand all the forces that are working for its extinction. I have touched on most of them throughout the report. No one can say when they might disappear from the Nebraska scene, but when they do as they will largely, researchers on the "Country School Legacy" can say they have had a hand in preserving its history.

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Postscript Highlights

My research has had highlights that I have not woven into the report. They are the spice that lend piquancy to a study. I shall "list" them here.

A doctoral candidate in Minnesota who is writing a dissertation on the spinster schoolteacher circa 1900 is exchanging material with me. She will supply me with comments from a woman of over ninety who taught in the North Platte area, and knew Buffalo Bill.

A professor of urban studies in Wisconsin is readying a book-length study of country school children in Nebraska. We are cognizant of each other's efforts and have exchanged some information.

An English headmaster over a three-teacher rural school there will visit the United States this spring. We plan to confer. He is studying rural schools in Europe, Australia, and the United States.

A request of a southeastern Nebraska newspaper for copies of ornate handwriting turned up many—and also a relative, previously unknown to me, in California.

Acting on a suggestion by Andrew Gulliford, the President of Kearney State College is activating a committee to plan for a rural school teachers' day at the annual homecoming festivities in the fall of 1981.

Several meetings are in prospect for me—lectures, newspaper articles, a national meeting this fall, an editorial, all these to complement three television appearances. An oral history workshop with Nancy Whistler and Andrew Gulliford, with forty-five influential people in English in attendance, was a major January, 1981, feature.

A truly major highlight—the people I have met from near and far in this endeavor plus the knowledge gained, etc., from the research and writing.

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Notes to Chapters

Chapter I

1. Rosalie Trail Fuller, A History of Camp Creek, Its Church, Cemetery and School. Subsequent references to the Camp Creek School come from this book. Published by Mrs. Fuller at Lincoln, 1980.

2. Telephone interview by Ernest Grundy of Mrs. Martha Brief, January 23, 1981. Mrs. Fuller's Camp Creek School (see note #1) is a rich source of annual school board reports from 1869 to 1900. It includes school censuses.

3. This school building, which served its times as church, community gathering place, and polling location, is a part of the Indian Cave State Park situated in the southeastern part of Nemaha County. Information has been supplied me by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Lincoln, Nebraska.

4. See Lenard E. Brown, historian, and Renzo Riddo, engineer, for Historic Structure Report: Freeman School, Homestead National Monument, Nebraska. Denver: Denver Service Center, United States Department of the Interior.

5. From a Homestead National Monument visitors' pamphlet. Ramon G. Brende, Park Ranger, Homestead National Monument, Beatrice, Nebraska, has supplied me with the information above.

6. Ella Mae Hurlbut, School by the Trail, published in 1967 by the Alexandria, Nebraska, Community Club and the Jefferson County Historical Society, Inc., co-guardians for the preservation of District 10.

7. Mildred Newman Flodman, Early Days in Polk County. Lincoln: Union College Press, 1966. Chapter 14, "School Days," discusses many features of early country schools.

8. Information on the Cunningham School was supplied me by a leaflet from the Nebraska State Fair Board.

9. The material above and that cited below comes from brochures contributed by Warren Rodgers, Educational Officer, Stuhr Museum of the Plains, Grand Island, Nebraska.

10. Information on the McCorkindale School has been supplied me by Dr. Lyle E. Seymour, President of Wayne State College.

Notes, continued

11. Data on the Goose Valley School supplied by Philip Gardner, Secretary of the Custer County Historical Society, Broken Bow, Nebraska. An article, "Historical Museums and Points of Interest," Nebraskaland, November, 1978, p. 5, discusses this school briefly.

12. Information comes from a printed leaflet supplied me by Mrs. Jackie O'Donnel, Curator.

13. Information taken from the Historical Society marker and from a telephone conversation with Mrs. Clara Garey, Edison.

14. From a letter from Adolph Thumin, n. d., and interview by Diane Hoffman of Mr. Thumin at Cambridge, December 23, 1980.

15. According to Section 79-102 School Districts, Classification of the Nebraska School Laws, revised 1978, a Class I district is "any school district that maintains only elementary grades under the direction of a single school board." Such a school as Englement Elementary at 4360 West Capitol Avenue, Grand Island, Nebraska, can have a faculty of nineteen and still be classed as a Class I school.

Chapter II.

1. Bess Streeter Aldrich, A Lantern in Her Hand. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1928.

2. Grace Snyder As told to Nellie Snyder Yost, No Time on My Hands. Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1963.

3. Snyder, No Time, pp. 88-91.

4. Snyder, No Time, pp. 98-100.

5. Snyder, No Time, pp. 171-72.

6. Alfred C. Nielsen, Life in an American Denmark. Des Moines: Grandview Press, 1962, p. 29. Rights to this book are now owned by the Arno Press, Mr. Nielsen has informed me by letter.

7. Auburn and Southeastern Nebraska. Lincoln: Small Towns Institute, Center for Great Plains Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1979, pp. 30-31.

8. Auburn, p. 32.

9. Letter from Everett Dick to Andrew Gulliford, December 17, 1980.

10. Oral interview with Senator Carl T. Curtis, conducted by James Smith and Roy Barnard, Kearney State College, May 30, 1980.

11. Frances Jacobs Alberts, editor, Sod House Memories, Vols. I, II, III. No city: Sod House Society, 1972, Vol. III, p. 162. Subsequent references will be to volume and page number.

12. Oral interview of Mae Manion by Sandra Scofield, December 5, 1980. One of Mrs. Manion's best known students was Mari Sandoz.

13. Robert Anderson, From Slavery to Affluence. Facts of publication not available.

14. Interview of Mrs. Maude Chamberlain McGuire by John Nickens at Alliance, Nebraska, September 6, 1980.

15. Oral interview of Mrs. Katharine Eliker by Ernest Grundy, October 9, 1980, at Dawson County Court House, Lexington, Nebraska.

16. Oral interview by Ernest and Phyllis Grundy of Dessa and Clifford Woodman at their farm home southeast of Shelton, Nebraska, November 10, 1980.

17. Oral interview of Mrs. Lorraine Englebrecht by Ernest Grundy at Ogallala, Nebraska, August 13, 1980.

18. Oral interview of Wilse Cross by Ernest Grundy at Arthur County Court House, Arthur, Nebraska, August 12, 1980.

19. Oral interview of Audrey Schoenbeck by Ernest and Phyllis Grundy, at Rock County Court House, Bassett, Nebraska, August 20, 1980.

Chapter III.

1. Oral interview with Dr. Anne Campbell by Dr. Anne Cognard, Co-director, Nebraska Committee for the Humanities, in Lincoln, December 17, 1980.

2. Harley Pfeiffer, Supervisor, Statistics and Facts about Nebraska, Vol. I, 1979-80. Lincoln: Nebraska State Department of Education, 1979-80.

3. Interview with Mrs. Lorraine Englebrecht by Ernest Grundy, August 13, 1980, at Ogallala, Nebraska.

4. Sophus Keith Winther, Take All to Nebraska. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976. First published 1936 by MacMillan Company. pp. 45-51.

5. Winther, Take All, pp. 141-163.

6. Nielsen, Life, pp. 83-84.

7. Snyder-Yost, No Time, pp. 145-46.

8. Interview with Mrs. Eliker, previously cited.

9. Interview with Mrs. Manion, previously cited.

Notes, continued

10. Oral interview of Mrs. Caroline Pifer by Sandra Scofield, December 11, 1980, in rural Gordon, Nebraska.

11. See "Country Schools and the Americanization of Ethnic Groups," paper prepared by Sandra Scofield, Chadron State College, for "The Country School Legacy," January 20, 1981.

12. Oral interview of Harry Younglund by Ernest Grundy at Stromsburg, Nebraska, October 14, 1980.

13. Oral interview by Loren Pinkerman of Clement W. Christensen, December 26, 1980, at Lynch, Nebraska, five miles east and two north.

14. Interview of Wilsie Cross by Ernest Grundy, August 12, 1980, previously cited.

Chapter IV.

1. Letter from Ray G. Parrish, Rulo, Nebraska, to Ernest Grundy, October 11, 1980.

2. Excerpts taken from Heritage Village School, published 1976 by the Office for Publications and Information, Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln Nebraska.

3. An unsigned, undated paper in possession of Stuhr Museum, Grand Island, Nebraska, Warren Rodgers, Educational Officer, is informative on textbooks in general and on the widespread use of the McGuffey Readers in particular, stating that 122,000,000 copes were issued from 1836 to 1920 and that many Nebraska schools used them.

4. William Christy, "The Ain't Box," And Never Let us Cry, Thesis, Kearney State College, July, 1966.

5. Robert L. Conger's paper, written February, 1981, for "The Country School Legacy," sent to Ernest Grundy.

6. Letter from Joseph E. Thackrey, Athens, Ohio, to Andrew Gulliford, Silt, Colorado, dated January 14, 1981.

7. Interview of Mrs. Helen Waits, Tryon, Nebraska, by Clayton Dobbins, City Superintendent of Schools, Tryon, Nebraska, September 25, 1980.

8. From Nebraska Teacher, Vol. 13, 1910-11, p. 132. Early copies of this unindexed journal are valuable sources of information on early country schools.

9. Fred Schroeder, "Educational Legacy: Rural One-room Schoolhouses, p. 9 in Historic Preservation

give date

Chapter V.

1. See the Appendix of Nebraska's Common Schools, Stuhr Museum.

2. From an essay by Karmen L. Karre, "The Life of Mari Sandoz as a Teacher," prepared for Dr. Helen Stauffer, Kearney State College, n.d.

3. Oral interview of Mrs. Edna Peniska by Helen Barber, a teacher at Santee School, Santee, Nebraska, January 12, 1981.

4. By Mattie Simmons as told to Faye Musil, "Memories of a Schoolmarm," Nebraskaland, Vol. 48, April 1970, pp. 36-39, 52-53. The editors add that "Mattie Simmons" is a fictitious character representing all schoolteachers of the times.

5. James Dertien's paper for "The Country School Legacy," January 21, 1981, p. 8, as taken from the W. P. A. Writers' Project, "Pioneer Life in Nebraska Pamphlets, Series II, p. 25—"Interview with Frank Grady (Raymond)."

6. Reported in Dertien's paper, p. 9, a story related by Grace Thompson to Berry Larsen, Orum, 1980.

7. Reported in Dertien's paper, pp. 8-9, from W. P. A. Writer's Project, "Interview with Charles Wertz (Richland) 1940. Pioneer Life in Nebraska Pamphlets, Series II, pp. 10-18.

8. Karmen L. Karre paper, p. 17.

9. John G. Neihardt, All is But a Beginning, Youth Remembered, 1881-1901. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972, pp. 156-163.

10. Jo Ann Asmus, Glenville Nebraska Centennial 1872-1972, n. d., no publisher listed, presumably by the author in Glenville.

11. A. J. Leach, History of Antelope County. Chicago: R. R. Donally and Sons, 1909, pp. 167-70.

12. Mrs. Mildred Anderson, taken from Polk newspaper, no date, circa 1980, (?) read onto tape during oral interview by Ernest Grundy at Stromsburg, Nebraska, October 16, 1980.

13. Edwin Ford Piper, "The Schoolmistress," Barbed Wire and Wayfarers. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924, pp. 48-52.

Chapter VI.

1. Nebraska Educational Service Units, A Decade of Progress 1967-77. Published by the Educational Service Units of Nebraska and the Nebraska Educational Service Unit Boards Association, no city, no date.

Notes, continued

2. Letter of November 5, 1980, from Rodney D. Smith, Administrator, ESU #11, Holdrege, Nebraska, to Ernest Grundy.

3. Don Welch, "Poet in Residence at a Country School, The Rarer Game. Kearney: Kearney State College Press, 1980, p. 11.

4. Letter from Dr. Martin L. Heflebower, Director/School Psychologist, Sandhills Educational Services Coop, Broken Bow, Nebraska, Dec. 5, 1980, to Ernest Grundy.

5. "Three R's," from James Dertien's report on "The Country School Legacy, pp. 8-14, previously cited.

6. Oral interview with Gordon Hansen, County Superintendent of Schools for Adams County, by Ernest Grundy, November 5, 1980, at Hanover School, District 75, 10 miles southeast of Hastings.

7. Reported in James Dertien's paper, p. 10, taken from an unpublished, untitled typed letter by C. W.Crum, Madison County Superintendent around the turn of the present century. Letter deposited with Madison County Historical Society.

8. Tape prepared by Ray Craig, Superintendent of Schools for Lincoln County, for Ernest Grundy and "The Country School Legacy," at North Platte, October 22, 1980.

9. Oral interview with Mr. Glen Estes, former County Superintendent of Schools for Rock County, Bassett, conducted by Ernest Grundy at Kearney State College Sept. 3, 1980, Kent Estes, son and KSC faculty, present.

10. Oral interview of Mrs. Jane Peterson, Rock County Superintendent of Schools, Bassett, by Ernest Grundy, August 20, 1980.

11. Oral interview with Miss Audrey Schoenbeck, District 75, Pleasant Hill School, Rock County, Nebraska, August 20, 1980, by Ernest and Phyllis Grundy. Pleasant Hill is about thirty-five miles northwest of Burwell, but similarly across sparsely populated lands.

12. Interview with Mrs. Christy Keller and Judith Duvalle at Bassett, August 20, 1980, by Ernest and Phyllis Grundy.

13. Peaceful Plains Paper, Peaceful Plains School, Thomas County, Nebraska, Sept. 1980, Vol. II, #1. Teacher: Tina Christensen, North Star Route, Stapleton, NE., 69163.